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**The Place of Education**  
**in Literature for Children in English**  
**1950-Present**

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**PhD Thesis**

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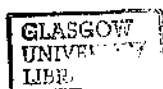
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## abstract

This thesis is primarily concerned with the institution of children's literature as imagined in recent criticism. The primary texts discussed are thus mainly novels for the eight to twelves/early teens which have received critical attention, and are not necessarily representative of the entirety of published matter destined for children. This literature, referred to throughout as kiddie-lit, is thus composed of texts favoured by, and conducive to, certain critical discourses which wish to find in the child's reading a site freed of social determination. These discourses, I argue, are profoundly influenced by the child-centred tradition of pedagogy, whose place in, and rhetorical affinities with, nineteenth-century philanthropic efforts to give power relations a softer appearance by effacing visible marks of difference and hierarchy I trace. Once this line of argument has been established, I go on to describe the literary critical apparatus that further liberalises these discourses to imagine in literature an educational domain that putatively speaks from the truth of the child, shedding any hint of adult teacherly intervention. Here, a trinity of originary discourses – the simple, the oral, and the organic – are shown in their critical, fictive and pedagogical manifestations. Kiddie-lit emerges from this as a literature that is to be seen as endowed with the disinterested quality that has sometimes been ascribed to its adult counterpart, only intensified by association with the child's assumed proximity to nature, and distance from the social. Subsequently, I explore the relation between this metaphorical notion of nature, and representations of the garden and the countryside which seek to embody it in text. Firstly I consider the alleged virtues of nature in the acquisition of knowledge, centring on the naming of a pure, trustworthy, and morally

negotiable terrain. I then go on to discuss kiddie-lit's strategies for squaring its metaphysical notion of nature with a landscape marked by economic and social change, and hence its efforts to reintegrate the garden or nature into a modern world perceived as being tainted by the dirt and anomie of industrial society. Finally, I outline what I will term the "archaeological" narrative, the story of the child's rediscovery of the past through an antique talisman found in the countryside, that has been reproduced by a remarkable number of different authors for children over the past thirty years. This popularity, and the high critical regard in which these authors and texts are held, I consider in the light of the narrative's ability to comprise kiddie-lit's major themes in a compact and recognizable form. Here, fantasy is given a natural form (the recurrence of the past) which apparently transcends either literary effect or scientific knowledge, and children are valued for the lack of academic knowledge that leaves them open to this phenomenon. Thus, the object, especially that which comes out of the soil of the countryside, is valued over the word, and a life's attachment to the land is implicitly promoted as a spontaneous form of education, one that leads to understanding and even community with the organic past. Comparison with a contemporaneous pedagogical enthusiasm for local history, which promotes similar ideas, is pertinent, suggesting a broader cultural current within which the archaeological story develops; one that includes liberal conservative continuous historiography and indeed Leavisite literary criticism. It is to be noted, however, that kiddie-lit, both in criticism and in fiction, which both make extensive symbolic use of the archaeological narrative, tends to ignore or reject cognate discourses which, if they are not necessarily influences, at least operate in the same broad field of political dispositions. In effect, the archaeological story provides the institution of kiddie-lit with its single most powerful and condensed myth, one that acknowledges no cultural

debt other than that to the land itself, and perpetuates its constituent ideas effortlessly in the to and fro between fiction and criticism, under the appearance of a perfectly self-sufficient autonomy. Finally, having thus characterised the structural coherence of the field on a thematic level, I suggest its possible operation in relation to other fields in literary studies, particularly its potential as a neutral zone for the recuperation and assimilation of theoretical/political discourses into an all-embracing liberalism.

It is not just that children's writing is seen as the repository of a literary tradition under threat of disintegration in the adult world. It is also that narrative fiction starts to be assigned a supreme status in the process of education itself.

(Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan: or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.63)

In his children's reading, man stages and performs over and over again the supposedly unproblematic scenes of his inner refuge. Regaling himself with his own legend, he falls into tautology; he admires himself in the mirror, thinking it to be a window. But the child playing down there in the garden is the purified adult looking back at himself.

(Dorfman and Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, 2nd edn (New York: International General, 1984), p.30).

The ideologies of [Pedagogic Action] as non-violent action – whether in Socratic and neo-Socratic myths of non-directive teaching, Rousseauistic myths of natural education, or pseudo-Freudian myths of non-repressive education – reveal in its clearest form the generic function of educational ideologies, in evading, by the gratuitous negation of one of its terms, the contradiction between the objective truth of [Pedagogic Action] and the necessary (inevitable) representation of this arbitrary action as necessary ('natural').

(Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 1977), p.13)

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## chapter one

# The Liberation of the Child

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This collection of essays assumes that children's books are as serious, complex, and deserving of study as any other literary genre. Nevertheless the commitment to being taken seriously has in the long run disadvantaged some of the earliest writers for children, since their work came to seem unpalatably didactic to later generations, excluding or repressing the high spirits, free-floating imagination, and anarchic feelings so characteristic of childhood. To chart the association of women writers with children's books for the first hundred and fifty years is to record the process by which their authors progressed from giving instruction to an identification with their readers, from proving themselves responsible adults to allowing themselves to adopt the subversive tones of childhood.<sup>1</sup>

While I have tried to see children's literature in its historical and social contexts, my standards are essentially literary. Children's books are part of literature, just as children are part of humanity. A good book for children must be a good book in its own right.<sup>2</sup>

So two recently published<sup>3</sup> critical works on children's books attempt to establish the validity of kiddie-lit studies by declaring their approach to be literary. That is, that they will consider their texts as "literature" and will proceed in a "literary critical" manner. In both accounts, the "literary" enjoys an uneasy relationship with the social, the

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Briggs, 'Women Writers: Sarah Fielding to E. Nesbit', in *Children and their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, ed. by Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp.221-248 (p.222).

<sup>2</sup> John Rowe Townsend, *Written for Children: An Outline of English-Language Children's Literature*, 5th edn (London: Bodley Head, 1990), p.xi. Further references, except where otherwise specified, are to this edition.

<sup>3</sup> The Townsend was first published in 1965 but has been since extensively revised in editions of 1974, 1983, 1987 and the present edition, used here, of 1990.

historical and the political. Both grant that the latter have a place, but it is one they would rather minimise; it is to be kept from the centre of literary critical consideration of text, or only introduced to centre it more fully, qua literature. Thus Townsend apologises for his consideration of "historical and social contexts"; the nub of his task is to provide judgements of literary value, to discover what is "essentially literary" in these texts. In fact, these two qualities of text – the socially determined and the literary – belong, in Townsend's *Written for Children*, of which the above is his declaration of intent, to exclusive epochs. For he moves, chronologically, from historical reportage towards lit-crit proper as he approaches the present day; history is a mere prop that becomes increasingly unnecessary as true literary values appear on the horizon. Implicitly, the degree to which Townsend engages with the social is decided by what he perceives to be the degree of social determination in the texts themselves.

The same movement can be seen explicitly in the passage quoted from Briggs. She also introduces history in an apologetic manner, to excuse the literary badness of earlier texts. From this point onwards, she traces a path of increasing autonomy towards a pure and true literariness, freed of the constraints of the social, so that the child's "high spirits, free-floating imagination, and anarchic feelings" are eventually let loose. Thus, for both critics, the social is decentred, extrinsic from, indeed inimical to, the business of literary production; its presence produces something quite different, known as the "didactic", a term to which we will return in more detail later. Fortunately, literature has managed, more or less, to extricate itself in recent times from its clammy grasp, disembarassing the critic of the unpleasant prospect of facing it.



One can see the same sort of opposition (literature vs the irksome features of the bureaucratized public sphere) in the recent cult of "subversion".<sup>4</sup>

Of course, in a sense much great literature is subversive, since its very existence implies that what matters is art, imagination, and truth. In what we call the real world, on the other hand, what usually counts is money, power, and public success.<sup>5</sup>

The more thoroughly literature transcends social determination, the more it deserves our attention, and this measure of desert may be termed "subversion". There is a strong sense of an end of history in sight in these accounts; the effect of social forces, contingent and annoying, has been stripped away and we (in kiddie-lit) have reached a stage of optimum autonomy in which authentic/universal essences can play freely. Thus empowered, children's literature, rather than be determined by, may now even determine the social to create its own version of reality; for this is the "ancient, subversive strength of literature: that it always acts as a critic and a creator of the world in which it lives".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This tendency is not limited to criticism of children's books. Foucault has (in an interview with Roger-Pol Droit from 1975) related it to a certain misreading of Barthes. "Thanks to it, one succeeded in saying that literature in itself was at this point freed from all determinations, that the fact of writing was in itself subversive, that the writer possesses, in the very gesture of writing, an imprescribable right to subversion! Consequently, the writer was a revolutionary, and the more the writing was Writing (*l'écriture était écriture*), the more it plunged into intransitivity, the more it produced in so doing the revolution!" (Michel Foucault, 'On Literature', trans. by John Johnston, in *Foucault Live* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), p.116 (first publ. in *Le monde sans visa*, 6 (1986)).

<sup>5</sup> Alison Lurie, *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups: Subversive Children's Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990), p.xi.

<sup>6</sup> Fred Inglis, *The Promise of Happiness; Value and Meaning in Children's Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.43-4.

In so doing, it seems to be desirable to stand outside the thing criticised, to speak from an autonomous sphere. It is thus, frequently, in a sense by no means vague or casual that the term "literature" is applied to writing for children. Mere reading matter does not count; literature is precisely that which evades the explicit face of social determination. This seems to be the essence of its "subversive" quality. This is further facilitated by the possibility of presenting, however fatuously, children as existing quite outside adult social formations, making them "the last truly anarchic counter-culture".<sup>7</sup>

For commentators on kiddie-lit in the liberal press, casual abuse of the term "subversive" is now almost second nature. The following example, from a review of Lynne Reid Banks's *Twelve Stories of the Magic Hare*, strikes a tone often heard of late.

Subverted fairy tales of spoilt queens and dragons outwitted by brains not brawn, with the sort of moral undertone that gives fables their force, plus a dash of wit.<sup>8</sup>

"Subverted fairy tales" has the solid, familiar sound of a new genre, suggestive of definite expectations.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, one is left to wonder what this *dependable* subversion might comprise. Is "brains not brawn"

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Hunt, 'Childist Criticism: The Subculture of the Child, the Book and the Critic', *Signal*, 43 (1984), 42-58 (p.58).

<sup>8</sup> Nicolette Jones, 'Marrow Escapes and Broad Bins', *Independent on Sunday Review*, 12 April 1992, p.32.

<sup>9</sup> There has been a boom in recent years in picture-book versions of the Three Little Pigs told from the wolf's point of view and such-like, many of which are quite entertaining, but scarcely subversive. Praise should go, nevertheless, to the gender-role reversals of Babette Cole.

new or different, never mind "subversive"? What, beyond an attempt at a racy style or mild irreverence, is being suggested? Then there is the question of *what* is being subverted. In subscribing to satire on "spoilt queens" the reviewer has scarcely found gender-role subversion, for example. Certainly "morals" are not being subverted; the review notes their presence with approval, at least in the form of a rather vague "undertone". Indeed, not even the armchair radicalism of genre subversion need be attempted for the label "subversive" to be comprehensible. The verb "to subvert" appears to have become thoroughly intransitive; it scarcely ever appears as a verb, but rather as an adverb or adjective – intensifiers, mere accessories. Yet like all really good accessories, these have the power to alter the whole outfit in the most discreet manner. Thus, while a text such as *Who's That Banging on the Ceiling?* by Colin McNaughton purveys charming nonsense and humorously gruesome illustration, it is hard to see what it gains from the "subversive" tag.

Inventive, wackily illustrated, full of subversively silly words, it builds to a satisfyingly outrageous climax in which King Kong is revealed in fold-out glory.<sup>10</sup>

One might say, with more purpose, "sillily subversive". Yet, this appropriation of large words redolent of seismic political activity to describe teddy bears and dragons, this body-snatching inroad into the radical, does not end with "subversive". It is possible for the blotchy, soft watercolour illustrations of Jan Ahlberg (usually showing postmen, old

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<sup>10</sup> Candice Rodd, 'A Mild Madness', *Independent on Sunday Review*, 22 November 1992, p.44.

ladies and young children at play) to be described as "almost anarchic"<sup>11</sup>, where charming and playful might come closer to the mark. The word "anarchy" seems to allude to no more than the fact that there is a lot going on in the pictures, which depict play in a playful manner.<sup>12</sup>

The books thus described may be highly entertaining, they may lure children into the habit of reading, or have any number of other sterling qualities. The term "subversive", however, will tell us none of this. So what then, one is led to inquire, does it tell us? Primarily, it has become a sign indicating the presence of what Julia Briggs describes (above) as "the high spirits, free-floating imagination, and anarchic feelings so characteristic of childhood", the voice of childhood liberated. Such a claim seems to have become a primary requirement in recommending books for children, such that the socially agreed (within the domain of kiddie-lit) token – "subversive" – recurs with almost neurotically overblown frequency. In addition, it implicitly intimates the absence of the stuffy, hectoring, brow-beating; the didactic.

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<sup>11</sup> Aisling Foster, 'In an Ideal World', *Independent on Sunday Review*, 8 November 1992, p.32.

<sup>12</sup> That this perceived radicality has little to do with current political battlegrounds is underlined by Foster's characterisation of a feminist response. "A feminist friend once tore an Ahlberg book from my bemused son's hands, declaring it sexist, sentimental and nostalgic for the bad old days" (Ibid.). This, Foster describes as "cant", the standard complaint of the liberal critic against the "didactic" impulse of such an open declaration of political interest, here amounting to an almost violent act of censorship. The hyperbolic politicisation of the terms employed by recent kiddie-lit crit is often matched by its aversion to any explicit avowal of political belief. Thus, in this instance, "feminism" is represented by a grotesque monster out of Strüwelpeter, threatening to rob the child of literature, and therefore subversion.

There is here a consistent telling of the history of kiddie-lit in terms of a flight to freedom from strict educational bondage that, through its widespread and casual acceptance, has acquired the air of a truth settled once and for all. Whence, it might be asked, springs this historical confidence? A strong contender for the post of deep source is F.J. Harvey Darton's *Children's Books in England*, first published in 1932 and commonly taken as the Genesis of modern kiddie-lit studies. For when Darton declares that the only "text" of his seminal and still hugely influential history of kiddie-lit is "that children's books were always the scene of a battle between instruction and amusement",<sup>13</sup> he adumbrates the broad strokes of a historical narrative that is often quoted by way of a spring-board or foundation for subsequent criticism. Furthermore he speaks with a certain authority since

only he has had the knowledge, the judgement and the detachment to stand back and take a long, cool look at the whole landscape without getting lost in the trees.<sup>14</sup>

So Townsend also acknowledges his debt to Darton's book, declaring it "still the most authoritative study of the subject over the period up to Queen Victoria's death" (*Written for Children*, pp.14-15) and, accordingly, in the earlier chapters/periods, he frequently defers to the master with some variation on "as Darton says" (*Written for Children*, pp.41, 43, 44, 64, 106). Such is the authority of this version, in its strong appeal to common-sense, and its ready diffusion, that, ironically, its precise terms

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<sup>13</sup> F.J. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, 3rd edn, rev. by Brian Alderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.vii.

<sup>14</sup> Gillian Avery, *Childhood's Pattern: A Study of the Heroes and Heroines of Children's Fiction 1770-1950* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), p.9.

no longer dominate discussion. For, generally speaking, "entertainment" is no more synonymous with "subversion" than is Mickey Mouse with Ché Guavara; yet here, in the field of kiddie-lit this ellipsis is sometimes taken as read. We are dealing, then, with a set of contentions made possible by, rather than necessarily made *by*, Darton; this I will nevertheless term, for the sake of ease, the Darton narrative.

As I have said, the Darton narrative has a strong commonsensical appeal. For there is no need to read *between* the lines of the relevant records to support its claims; these are nothing more than a frank recapitulation of a thoroughly self-conscious opposition that starts in the late eighteenth century (at the very earliest), and continues into the present. Catherine Sinclair, whose *Holiday House* (1839) is noted by Darton as one of the earliest glimmerings of the "dawn of levity"<sup>15</sup>, clearly has some such theory in mind.

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<sup>15</sup> see Darton, Ch.xii, 'Interim Again: The Dawn of Levity', pp.199-218.

The minds of young people are now manufactured like webs of linen, all alike, and nothing left to Nature. [...] They are carefully prompted what to say, and what to think, and how to look, and how to feel; while in most school-rooms Nature has been turned out of doors with obloquy, and Art has entirely supplanted her.<sup>16</sup>

Sinclair implies that her stories will go against this grain, representing, and, we are left to surmise, fostering, a more boisterous, independent breed of child.<sup>17</sup> Such a stated desire – not to manufacture kids, Gradgrind-wise, but to foster and nurture them – does seem to gather momentum throughout the nineteenth century, and to represent a continuous trend. The spectre of the didactic, however is never far away, and there are always those, we are told, who wish to use children's fiction as the vehicle for social engineering of some sort. This, indeed, is the explicit argument of no less a figure than Dickens, a writer not usually thought of as slow to moralise.

Now, it makes not the least difference to our objection whether we agree or disagree with our worthy friend, Mr. Cruikshank, in the opinions he interpolates upon an old fairy story. Whether good or bad in themselves, they are, in that relation, like the famous definition of a weed; a thing growing in the wrong place.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Catherine Sinclair, *Holiday House: A Book for the Young* (London: Ward Lock, 1909), p.5.

<sup>17</sup> It is interesting, if anecdotal, to note that the precise copy of *Holiday House* to which I have referred was, according to its ex libris, given as the "Cathcart Parish Church Sabbath School, prize (senior) For Attendance, Behaviour and Proficiency, May 1911" (Rare Books and Manuscripts, Mitchell Library, Glasgow), suggesting that the text was capable of uses other than the cultivation of levity.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Dickens, 'Frauds on the Fairies', *Household Words*, vol.8, no. 184 (Oct 1853), pp.97-100, (repr. in *Children's Literature: The Development of Criticism*, ed. by Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.24-26 (p.26)).

Dickens thus imagines various possible "foaming hobb[ies]" upon which Robinson Crusoe might be mounted.

Imagine a Total Abstinence edition of Robinson Crusoe, with the rum left out. Imagine a Peace edition, with the gunpowder left out, and the rum left in. Imagine a Vegetarian edition, with the goat's flesh left out [...].

(Dickens, 'Frauds', p.26)

These, and any number of similar instances, we might take as representing proof of Darton's argument; yet, in as far as this sort of material is evidence, it only proves the presence of a *rhetoric* opposing didactic artificiality to an original, natural freedom or energy, which can be rediscovered when ideology is removed. We are invited to see this rhetoric as a *fait accompli*, a proof of its own contention that those who can recognize the evils of didacticism are necessarily working towards an original freedom. In other words, ironically, the belief that one should humanise education by nurturing the natural spontaneity of the child emerges as a self-conscious rhetoric, that is as an *ideological project*, in the period with which we are concerned.



\*

This rhetoric perpetuates itself not least in denying its own ideological status. So when Gillian Avery concedes that "children's books have always been particularly vulnerable to the ideologies of the age"<sup>19</sup> we are by no means meant to see her own position as ideological. For ideology is the result of more or less self-conscious bad faith.

Those who write for children in any age meekly tend to range themselves with the most dominant and vociferous moralists among their contemporaries, paying lip service at any rate to a code they may not necessarily feel strongly about themselves.

(Avery, 'The Puritans and their Heirs', p.96)

To illustrate her point, Avery surveys the product of a hack in an age of hacks (the late 17th century), Nathaniel Crouch.

No Puritan zealot himself, he nevertheless saw that his books, to sell, would have to have a Puritan cast to them. He was not an original writer; rather, a reaper of other men's fields [...].

(Avery, 'The Puritans and their Heirs', p.99)

The didactic is, according to this account, what results when the author is disengaged from his task, leaving himself passive to the dominant ideology; a literature with ideals, whatever else it might be, can never be accused of this. What remains unthought throughout this

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<sup>19</sup> Gillian Avery, 'The Puritan's and their Heirs', in *Children and their Books*, pp.95-117 (p.95).

argument is the possibility of the unconscious internalisation of norms, that is ideology as it is understood after Gramsci and Althusser. Avery, and critics like her, only tackle a version of ideology that consists of external and plainly visible forces which one is free to refuse. The literary artist, the anti-didact, is he who refuses. Apparently we all know this, and can recognise it when we see it. Thus, safe within the Darton narrative, the ideological enemy is clearly defined, and, having achieved autonomy, all kiddie-lit has to fear is the periodic resurgence of this enemy. Indeed, we are occasionally warned of this eventuality. Here, for instance, Penelope Lively, in her foreword to the 'Woman's Hour' guide to children's reading, presents the modern didactic precisely as the too-blatant presence of a political agenda.

Victorian didacticism is far from defunct; plenty of people still see children's books as primarily instructive – not just in the sense of teaching facts but also teaching attitudes, inculcating proper views about race or sex or society.<sup>20</sup>

Such a statement leaves Lively's own views on race, sex and society quite unclear. Nevertheless, one suspects that the desired impression is not one of blimpish reaction. What is thus evidenced is rather a sort of tactful, liberal refusal to set an explicit agenda. In a similar fashion, Brian Alderson, annotating Darton, warns us that "newer didacticisms that have had currency in the decades since 1940 have also sought to harness fairytales to their objects ", for example "feminist and conservationist versions" (Darton, p.353, n.6). Alderson does not necessarily wish to appear to criticise "feminism" or "conservationism" here; the accusation

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<sup>20</sup> Julia Eccleshare, *Treasure Islands* (London: BBC Books, 1988), p.1.

of "didacticism" is that these things have no place foisting their *manifestoes* on the elusive imaginary structures of fairy tales.

The same applies to criticism as to literary production; merely by seeking to put kiddie-lit into the sociological frame, one may find oneself in the anti-literature/freedom camp. In this way, the Bob Dixons of this world

can only make their mark with those who are interested in the sociological content of literature but unmindful of its peculiar essence, part of which is the beauty of a language they seek to put in splints.<sup>21</sup>

While the present writer would by no means choose to align himself with Dixon, whose attempts at political critique of kiddie-lit<sup>22</sup> are indeed crude and prescriptive, it would seem that in the very act of not swooning over literature's mysterious essence this will be the result.

Didacticism, then, wherever, and whenever, it occurs is the result of a more or less self-conscious imposition of an issue onto a work of fiction. The question of political content is subsumed by one of literary form. Imagine, then, the scandal and uproar when, in 1980, Rosemary Stones of the 'Children's Rights Workshop' published a list of guidelines for the appraisal – and, implicitly, for the writing – of children's books, seemingly

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<sup>21</sup> Elaine Moss, 'The Seventies in British Children's Books', in *Part of the Pattern: A Personal Journey Through the World of Children's Books, 1960-1985* (London: Bodley Head, 1986), pp. 136-160 (p.141).

<sup>22</sup> Bob Dixon, *Catching Them Young 1: Sex, Race and Class in Children's Fiction* (London: Pluto, 1977) and *Catching Them Young 2: Political Ideas in Children's Fiction* (London: Pluto, 1977).

aiming at what would now be called "Political Correctness". Under Stones's beady gaze, many old and respected members of the kiddie-lit canon were found wanting, negligent or downright pernicious, principally on the grounds of racism, sexism and class bias. Scuffles broke out, with, for example, Margery Fisher, a bastion of kiddie-lit crit (*New Era*, June 1980). In the Summer 1980 issue of *The Author*, Clive King rushed to the defence of his literature. Feelings in this quiet backwater of the literary world rose to a pitch perhaps inexplicable to outsiders. Eventually, just before Christmas, the *New Statesman* was hailed in, as a sort of court of higher appeal in which both sides could air their grievances. The case is instructive in that it presents in condensed form the battle between didactic and literature outlined above.

The usual charge is applied; Stones and her ilk stand accused of "a fervour reminiscent of the Christian didacts of the 19th century"<sup>23</sup>. The recurrence of this historical horror demands of the critic nothing less than an all-out defence of literature.

To force a work of literary imagination through the sieve of an 'ism' is to do violence to the complex interplay between the overall narrative structure and the reader.<sup>24</sup>

To put it succinctly, then, Stones's hubris is that she has set an agenda before the writer that must be satisfied whenever he sits down to write; kiddie-lit's record on representation of race identity and gender role

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<sup>23</sup> Jill Paton Walsh, 'The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea', *New Statesman*, 28 November 1980, 28-30 (p.29).

<sup>24</sup> David Caute, 'No More Firemen', *New Statesman*, 14 November 1980, 16-19 (p.19).

is inadequate, and it must do better. One author is thus horrified that literature should be seen as

a bibliotherapist's pharmacopeia [...] treating children's books as one would be treating adult literature if one rushed to buy *Anna Karenina* for friends suspected of adultery, or ministered to distressed old age with copies of *King Lear*.

(Walsh, 'The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea', p.28)

There is a sense, however, in which Stones does kiddie-lit a great favour. For she affords it the opportunity to replay its genesis myth.

It is *literature* which is being discussed and which is now being attacked with false accusations.

(Walsh, 'The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea', p.28)

The very well-meaning crudity of Stones's approach – which hunts down "bias in children's literature", that is to say "stereotypes, omission, eurocentrism etc.",<sup>25</sup> only to erase their most obvious marks – makes of it a convenient Aunt Sally. This is particularly the case given that ideology is imagined as "bias", putting debate on the level of intention, and thus allowing the accused to *quite sincerely* deny the charge. In the face of what then appear as gross calumnies, critic and author alike *must* band together to protect all that is purely literary.

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<sup>25</sup> Rosemary Stones, 'To the Salt Mines?', *New Statesman*, 21 November 1980, 16-18 (p.17).

Critics such as John Rowe Townsend and *The Times's* Brian Alderson reject this as too crude an approach [...]. Reviewing, they believe, should be based on gauging literary merit.<sup>26</sup>

If this is truly the historical mechanism of kiddie-lit, if the didactic/literature opposition is its grand dialectic, then there seems precious little hope of synthesis. For the appearance on the didactic side of making political commitment a primary requirement of writing for kids, simulates a disregard for literature which merely allows the literary camp to loftily disregard politics. Stones and her lobby group never were a force to be reckoned with in kiddie-lit; they only became so for their fifteen minutes of stardom in the necessary role of eternal didact. It thus matters little that change is meanwhile tactfully occurring out of sight, and that yesterday's literature may be outlawed as didactic today; that is, excluded on formal grounds, and certainly not for overtly political reasons.

Recent attempts to, ostensibly, theorise and even politicise criticism, in following this schema, merely repeat it in another form. Peter Hunt, the main figure in this tendency, seems to want to question the old order, both in his criticism of texts previously thought adequate, and in his frequent theoretical manifestoes. In the first instance, one reorders the existing canon without changing the fundamental ground rules. Thus, Hunt re-examines Michelle Magorian's *Goodnight Mr Tom* in such a way as to show that a feted text is suspiciously didactic. For he finds that "Magorian's text tells rather than shows, explicates rather than

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<sup>26</sup> Rick Rogers, 'Dragon's Teeth', *New Statesman*, 19/26 December 1980, 46-47 (p.46).

demonstrates"; a classic diagnosis of didacticism<sup>27</sup>. Such a critique may be seen as part of a periodic clean-up designed to collar texts that have slipped behind in the progress towards liberation and fallen into the didactic. Hunt, however, occasionally hints at a more fundamental theoretical rethink.

It is a commonplace to say that nineteenth-century children's books were heavily didactic, and that they were primarily designed to mould children intellectually or politically. Generally, it has been assumed that children's books now represent – and should represent – freedom of thought. Whether this is actually possible might be debated [...].

(Hunt, *Criticism*, p.28)

Hunt may seem to want to problematise the old opposition here. Yet he has staged a running battle with the sole critique of this notion extant, the highly impressive *The Case of Peter Pan* by Jacqueline Rose. In direct response to Rose's notion of the "impossibility" of children's literature, Hunt merely declares the liberatory project unfinished.

Until we have an attitude of mind (and a criticism) which not only wishes to expand and liberate the child reader but also attempts to understand that this cannot be done by the mixture-as-before, we will not really have children's fiction at all [...].<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Hunt, *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p.85. Further references will take the form (Hunt, *Criticism*, p.x).

<sup>28</sup> Peter Hunt, 'Questions of Method and Methods of Questioning: Childist Criticism in Action', *Signal*, 45 (1984), 180-200 (p.185).

Such a falling back into the old story from a seemingly new position is typical of the *Signal* critics (Peter Hunt, Margaret Meek, Aidan Chambers et al.). Here, the emphasis is on *how* we are to write for children in such a way as to free them. Emphasis on the "how" further calls into question the identity of the "we". For, as used by Hunt (above), the pronoun magically coalesces the functions of author and critic. Nor is this usage a one-off aberration. The figure of the author/critic in kiddie-lit (Hunt, Townsend, Aidan Chambers, Jill Paton Walsh) is no mere accident; rather it is the concrete expression of something implicit in most writing on children's fiction. A critic may, as does Margaret Meek here, cite Jonathan Culler's "a theory of literature is a theory of reading" to suggest a move from author- to reader-based criticism, but the bathetic plunge back into the responsibility/technique of the author instantly commences.

Imagine critics of children's books being able to say what authors teach children about reading, how they learn the nature of the pause in Philippa Pearce, or which sentences in Madeleine L'Engle throw the switch that moves them 'in' to the story.<sup>29</sup>

So, in teaching kids how to read, *really* read, we liberate them. Kiddie-lit criticism, whether theorised or not, tends to fall into a contradiction of its own making. For in wishing to free the child voice, to take, as Hunt would have it, a "childist" stance, it is drawn back with a seeming inevitability to the position, the responsibility, of the (adult) author. There is much talk of the necessity, and the salutary effect, of identification with the child voice, of which more in the following

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<sup>29</sup> Margaret Meek, 'What Counts as Evidence in Theories of Children's Literature?', in *Children's Literature*, pp.166-180 (p.179) (first publ. in *Theory into Practice*, vol.21, no.4 (Autumn 1982), 284-92).



chapter, yet finally, all this leaves us with is an epoch in which, to paraphrase Julia Briggs against the grain of her wishes, authors have moved from having to prove themselves responsible adults, to having to prove themselves *subversive* adults. Emphasis is firmly, immovably even, on the individual and his responsibility to counter the massive and social, precisely by keeping his hands miraculously clean of it. Unless he is a certified didact, we are never to speak of the individual's position *within* social formations – principally education – only his perpetual flight from them.

Thus, even where critical theory is championed, there is a notable silence over the matter of Althusser. This is nowhere more apparent than on the rare occasion where a critic seems to want to use Althusserian theory. In his chapter on 'Producing Children's Literature' (*Criticism*, pp.155-174), Peter Hunt quotes approvingly, epigraphically, from Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production*, and seems to want to apply his theories. Yet he signally fails to tackle what is arguably the cornerstone of Macherey's production theory.

It is possible to assert that the use of literature in schools and its place in education is only the converse of the *place of education in literature* and that therefore the basis of the the production of literary effects is the very structure and historical role of the currently dominant ideological state apparatus. And that too is why it is possible to denounce as a denial of their own real practice the claims of the writer and his cultured readers to rise above simple classroom exercises, and evade them.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, 'Literature as an Ideological Form', in *Modern Literary Theory* ed. by Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), pp.62-70 (p.70) (first publ. in *Oxford Literary Review*, 3:1 (1978), 6;8;10;11-12).

Hunt, however, while seeming to inscribe kiddie-lit in a network of social determination, discusses *not* education, but "teachers" (see diagram, *Criticism*, p.158), and devotes his argument to an account of the problems (explicit editorial censorship etc.) in the "production" of his own children's books. So the argument is individualised, has individual self-consciousness as its subject, and so it utterly fails to meet the challenge of Althusserian theory, which speaks of the cop inside one's head, rather than that which inhabits the editor's office. Indeed, Hunt is markedly defensive on the question of why he may have excluded certain subjects from a book for young adults.

It didn't have any 'sex' scenes, partly because I find them difficult to write, and partly because they wouldn't have been relevant to the story. However, I did not make a conscious decision *not* to include any reference to sex [...].

(Hunt, *Criticism*, p.166)

One would like to know *why* he finds such scenes difficult to write, but even this is not the central point. To whom, in the first place, does Hunt feel he owes this tortuous explanation? Furthermore, the use of the double negative – to not decide not to – conveys nothing more than a confused desire to nullify any question of agency, conscious or otherwise. When, finally we learn that sex was, in any case "there by implication" (*Criticism*, p.166) – that which is sometimes impolitely known as innuendo – the involuntary confession is almost complete. There remains only the astonishing admission that drugs are not included in the text because "in the 21 years that I have been teaching at universities, I have never myself come across drug-taking" (*Criticism*, p.166) to complete

the spectacle of the very sort of liberal self-policing to which Hunt's recuperation of "theory" is entirely blind.

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The story so far, then, is that kiddie-lit (it will be noted that I frequently use this term to describe its self-characterisation in the field of criticism) seeks to flee social determination of the subject, into an autonomous zone, known as "literature", and away from the hideous "didactic", the slop bucket into which failed flights fall.

The idea that anyone might write for children *not* as a teacher in disguise, nor as an extra-curricular psychiatric social worker, seems strange to many people.

(Walsh, 'The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea', p.28)

It might, therefore, be taken to eschew all educational purpose. Yet this presents a rhetorical problem; for this is not to be a directionless, amoral project. Indeed, as has been noted, it anticipates benign social influence.

The stories we tell them are intended to make life in the future. This doesn't mean that, in some ghastly extension of Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby, stories are there to dictate [...].

(Inglis, p.32)

The problem, then, is how to teach without becoming didactic, how to tell without *telling*, as in "if I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times" etc. Indeed, literature has often been thought of as offering just such a facility.

Every great novel is a lesson for us, not a didactic lesson, not just good advice, but a lesson in the sense that it embodies a literary idea.<sup>31</sup>

According to William Walsh (as distinct from Jill Paton), we are inclined to subscribe to an "unduly narrow conception of teacher" (William Walsh, p.196). Literature (Walsh is concerned here with the literature of the child critic; patron saints, Huck Finn and Maisie) opens up a free educational sphere. Certain texts are such natural teachers that they may be left to act spontaneously on the child. Ideas of this sort have been popular in recent criticism. Here, for instance, is Margaret Meek.

One of the sharpest late reading lessons I have learned is to *let* the texts teach the reader, as I would do in the case of *Huckleberry Finn*.<sup>32</sup>

Liberation comes when the children "feel they are really rewriting the story as they read it" (Meek, *How Texts Teach*, p.20). These lucky children have "powerful allies in a host of gifted artists and writers to help them to subvert the world of their elders" (Meek, *How Texts Teach*, p.40). The child's friend is thus *that* teacher who, by offering the child the chance to learn without being taught, liberates it. Surely, then, texts of this sort cannot be didactic.

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<sup>31</sup> William Walsh, *The Use of Imagination: Educational Thought and the Literary Mind* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1966), p.135.

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Meek, *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn* (Stroud: The Thimble Press, 1988), p.38.

Current educational theory, [...] has always had great influence on reputable publishing for children (the downright subversive, of course, goes its own way) [...].<sup>33</sup>

Avery's is the most telling negotiation of this problem. The very casualness with which "the subversive" is accepted as given – "of course" – is the Dead Giveaway. For children's literature thus described does *not* escape "current educational theory". Indeed it is profoundly implicated in that tendency of educational thought that, over the past two centuries, has represented the "progressive". For kiddie-lit is intensely concerned with all that is *child-centred*.

Child-centred educational theory is – broadly speaking, for there have been many versions – concerned with allowing the child autonomy to teach himself. The teacher will play a minimal role that consists of subtly leaving various activities/situations in the child's path – or better still, teaching in an environment where they occur spontaneously – and occasionally prodding the child's attention in a certain direction. All of this, in any case, should proceed from the desires and inclinations of the child. Rousseau pioneers such a method in *Emile*.

It is for him to want to learn, to seek and to find it. You should put it within his reach, you should skilfully awaken the desire and supply him with means for its satisfaction.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gillian Avery, 'George MacDonald and the Victorian Fairy Tale', in *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald*, ed. by William Raeper (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp.126-139 (p.116).

<sup>34</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. by Barbara Foxley (London: Dent, 1911; repr. 1989), p.142. Please note that where this edition is specifically cited, the spelling "*Émile*" will

The didactic, rote learning and parrotting facts, can only be stultifying; the "desire to learn" (*Émile*, p.81) must be accessed. It is important, therefore, for the tutor to minimise explicit authority. Firstly, the child must withdraw from ties of familial power.

Emile is an orphan. No matter whether he has father or mother, having undertaken their duties I am invested with their rights.

(*Émile*, p.20)

Having thus "orphaned" the child, Jean-Jacques the tutor is free to exercise power in a new way. Emile is constantly drawn into situations in which Jean-Jacques is an equal participant. To teach navigation by the sun, they lose themselves in the forest at Montmorency and a sort of comic double act ensues. Jean-Jacques drops the heavy hint that it is NOON.

*Jean Jacques.* Did we not say the forest was –

*Emile.* North of Montmorency.

*Jean Jacques.* Then Montmorency must lie –

*Emile.* South of the forest.

(*Émile*, p.144)

And so on; the way out of the forest can be determined according to the direction of shadows. Rousseau's exposition is intensely fictive, but

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be used, as it appears on the title page. Elsewhere, more general reference to the name itself will take the typographically more elegant form "Emile", without the superfluous accent.

there is never any real doubt as to the outcome of any given vignette; although these vignettes often resemble what has become the adventure story genre, as works of suspense they certainly fail. For time and again, the same mechanism is followed. Situations are manufactured in which Emile has to work through the various inductive steps for himself. Hence such claims as:

I do not profess to teach Emile geometry; he will teach me; I shall seek for relations, he will find them, for I shall seek in such a fashion as to make him find.  
(*Émile*, p.110)

Here, then, are the bones of the allegedly liberatory child-centred method. Contradictions are already apparent. For the child will be allowed to roam free, but only up to a point. Starkly opposed to the scrupulous self-effacement that Jean-Jacques displays while involved with Emile as a peer adventurer, is his crowing pride in the efficacy of his method in the surrounding commentary. For it is the very intensity and precision of Jean-Jacques's planning that gives Emile the illusion of spontaneity. Emile may appear, to Emile, to have outwitted a fraudulent fairground huckster. Jean-Jacques, however, knows better.

I could not help laughing when I read an elaborate criticism of this little tale by M. de Formy. "This conjuror," says he, "who is afraid of a child's competition and preaches to his tutor is the sort of person we meet with in the world in which Emile and such as he are living". This witty M. de Formy could not guess that this little scene was arranged beforehand, and that the juggler was taught his part in it; indeed I did not state this fact. But I have said again and again that I was not writing for people who expected to be told everything.

(*Émile*, pp.136-7, n.1)



Whether or not *we* expect to be told everything, Emile must certainly never read the book with which he is synonymous, at least not while he remains a child and a pupil. For in as far as the secret exercise of power is important to Rousseau's proposed method, there are already limits to the possible audience of the book.

A similar disjunction between what the pupil must be told, and the theory behind it, obtains in much child-centred writing of the present epoch. It is the tutor's greatest achievement to disappear from the scene of which he is the author.

I have often been conscious of the fact that when my class most obviously appeared to be doing what they liked in complete freedom, then whatever skill I possessed as a teacher was being taxed to the utmost limit.<sup>35</sup>

Razzell is discussing the implementation of the Plowden Report, one in a long line of educational documents designed to humanise primary school teaching, drawing on child-centred/activity thinking. The emphasis is, much as in Rousseau, on the creation of enabling situations in which the teacher submerges himself as a character.

This was by no means a teacher-directed operation, although it could not have happened without her. Her role throughout was confined to the occasional question 'Why?' or 'How could you find out?' or 'What would happen if...?' plus the ability to be around at the critical time to add the word of encouragement or caution-- 'I should check those figures again if I were you!'.

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<sup>35</sup> Arthur Razzell, *Juniors: A Postscript to Plowden* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p.32.

(Razzell, p.103)

The *processes* of learning, and thus of teaching method, are at a premium over content. What is important is not so much what the child learns as that the journey to understanding is exciting and adventurous.

It could happen that his own ship of discovery would arrive at the same point in the end, but after a vastly more exciting journey, and one in which he would have been the captain— the 'agent in his own learning'.

(Razzell, p.102)

Implicit in this description of method is a belief in the originary power of the child himself. For when the adult absents himself, he removes, at the same stroke, society, the adult society of markets and systems. The child is left to its own resources in a prejudice-free space, where value is real value. This, at least, is how a formative figure in the twentieth-century, liberal democratic conception of paedocentrism, John Dewey, sees it.

For in schools, occupations are not carried out for pecuniary gain but for their own content. Freed from extraneous associations and from the pressure of wage-earning, they supply modes of experience which are intrinsically valuable; they are truly liberalizing in quality.<sup>36</sup>

The child-centred teacher, then, is a sort of valve or filter, the practitioner of a *method* which excludes all preconceived *content* (society).

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<sup>36</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), p.235.

Some fairly obvious critiques of this sort of thinking, as it applies directly to classroom teaching, have been made. Firstly, if the teacher is genuinely to absent himself into some non-judgemental, non-interventionist sphere, in what manner, asks R.F. Dearden, can he be said to teach? The problem is one of content.

What is he to teach, if indeed he may teach at all with out suffering the pangs of a conscience bred in him by an extreme child-centred ideology?<sup>37</sup>

Conversely, even if such an extreme posture were possible, would the teacher thus escape the teacher/pupil power relation?

Even for the teacher to withdraw as much as possible from the scene is for him to make a choice.

(Dearden, p.13)

There is a danger therefore that all that is effected is the discreet and likeable transmission of the same old clichés and fallacies as ever, all the more dangerous in that they spring from a source that is so self-effacing and nice that the impulse to question – supposedly fostered by child-centred method – is forestalled. This is a central criticism made by Harold Entwistle in a lucid work first published in 1970.

One must allow that the child's immaturity makes him particularly vulnerable to the teacher who is not obviously incompetent; who has an air of knowing and a

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<sup>37</sup> R.F. Dearden, *The Philosophy of Primary Education: An Introduction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p.11.

facility with personal relationships, thus masking the obsolescence of his material or his own lack of intellectual rigour.<sup>38</sup>

Entwistle sees the implicit child-centred notion of freedom through imprisonment as "essentially a confidence trick" and (quoting Isaiah Berlin) suggests that it operates through "sleight of hand" (Entwistle, p.50).

The problematic of child-centred theory thus resembles childist-type kiddie-lit criticism. For it deplores authority and seeks to erase its traces by eliding the tangible figure of the didact. As kiddie-lit is concerned to tell us that it has devolved, or aims to devolve, the onus of interpretation from author to reader, so with child-centred theory the pupil will be foregrounded at the expense of the teacher. What ensues, however, is an obsession with the teacher/author and his method. Power does not disappear from the account, rather it attains its finest hour when it has managed to conceal its own performance. Having done so, however, like Rousseau, it cannot resist going into another room (here, criticism) and proclaiming its success. Having adumbrated this problematic in theoretical, and admittedly transhistorical, terms, more must be said of how it relates to the positioning of the author within the kiddie-lit text.

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<sup>38</sup> Harold Entwistle, *Child-Centred Education* (London: Methuen, 1974), p.73.

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By author I mean here neither the personage, nor even the totality of his oeuvre, but the ensemble of techniques employed in a text to secure a certain reading. This I will consider as at once implicit in any act of writing, with particular reference to the novelistic, and at the same time as not absolutely determinant of all possible readings. Thus, one may elaborate the genre conventions which underwrite a given text, or the narratives that hold together a distinct field of discourse – of which I am suggesting kiddie-lit is one – but one has not, thereby, described every conceivable response, in perpetuity, to that text. This is an approach in line with Frederick Jameson's notion of genres as "literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public" mediating response.

Still, as texts free themselves more and more from an immediate performance situation, it becomes ever more difficult to enforce a given generic rule on their readers. No small part of the art of writing, indeed, is absorbed by this (impossible) attempt to devise a foolproof mechanism for the automatic exclusion of undesirable response to a given literary utterance.<sup>39</sup>

My critique will thus take place on the level of rhetoric, considering strategies found in texts that aim to position a certain authoritative voice. In spite of its positive presence in writing, however, such a positioning should not be taken as a *fait accompli* in any given reading. In any case, it is the particularity of kiddie-lit's conception of itself *vis à vis* authority and the author function, that I wish to discuss.

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<sup>39</sup> Frederick Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), pp.106-7.

The writer of children's fiction has one distinct advantage over the classroom teacher in effacing himself from the proceedings. For here, there is no need for a conspicuous adult figure to intrude at all. E. Nesbit has often been cited as an important pioneer of child freedom, as "in the Bastable books there seems to be no storyteller behind Oswald".<sup>40</sup> Thus Julia Briggs also sees *The Treasure Seekers* as a breakthrough, since

The device of adopting Oswald as narrator avoids the situation of an adult talking down to children, the common pattern of so much earlier writing [...].

(Briggs, 'Women Writers', p.245)

Apparently, then, the achievement of a self-absenting adult authority is an important, historical step towards the production of a liberated children's literature.

The first problem is, surely, that Nesbit does *not*, as Briggs would have it, avoid condescension, merely the appearance of it. For, as Briggs herself suggests, Nesbit sets Oswald up as both critic of adult mores and pompous boy-child, and we "can thus laugh with him and at him" ('Women Writers', p.245). Regardless of whether or not the latter represents a critique of patriarchy (Ibid.), it clearly implicates an adult voice and audience for childish caprice. The authorial voice embeds itself in Oswald, but it is nevertheless there.

Indeed, as the didact vanishes, particularly in the late nineteenth century, it is the voice of the friendly tutor, discreetly involving the

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<sup>40</sup> W.W.Robson, 'E.Nesbit and The Book of Dragons', in *Children and their Books*, pp.251-269 (p.257).

reader's collusion, that takes over the narrative helm of kiddie-lit. Mrs Molesworth is a lady writer identified by Julia Briggs as one of the generation first "concerned to present children's experiences as they appeared to a child or as a child might describe them" ('Women Writers', p.244). In her *The Cuckoo Clock* (1877), sometimes taken to be the inspiration for Nesbit's Psammead stories and one of the few late Victorian texts that continues to be reprinted in Puffin, the child Griselda is the central consciousness of the text, but is by no means the narrator. Indeed, the anonymous authorial voice directly addresses the reader on occasions. If this is the voice of a didact, however, it is one of the new breed, who seeks to engage the child reader's sympathy and involvement with a quibble over her own phrase "Griselda's cold was much better". She asks, how can a cold get better?

Children, I feel quite in a hobble – I cannot get my mind straight about it – please think it over and give me your opinion.<sup>41</sup>

A concession is made, authorial omniscience is seemingly questioned; the strategy is one that might now be called interactive or self-referential. The continued presence, however of an adult voice is worth noticing. For whatever child voices are personated throughout the text, the ultimate frame of them all must be that of the adult author, in some posture or guise, which must be gracefully elided, either in the writing, or in the child's reading, if uninterrupted identification is to take place.

It is this sort of device that is characteristic of the new softness of these lady writers at the end of the nineteenth century. The authorial

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<sup>41</sup> Mrs Molesworth, *The Cuckoo Clock* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1988), p.72.

voice, warm and motherly, defers to the child reader, encouraging some sort of involvement in constructing the story. The point at issue – how can a cold get better – is really quite footling, a pallid attempt at the sort of word play favoured by Lewis Carroll in his letters to little girls, and indeed the tone is quite similar to these. There is a concession in the come hither of the address, yet it leads to a point of little importance. Conversely, where the authorial voice considers Griselda's moral well-being, it is quite in control, all the more so for diffusing and diverting itself through the mysterious – and apparently authorless and unprompted – workings of her mind.

Griselda could have stamped with irritation, but somehow, in spite of herself, she felt compelled to say nothing.

(Molesworth, p.74)

No opinions are directly sought here; Griselda's dawning mastery of manners is left to be inferred, though none the less forcefully affirmed for remaining a mystery. Like a wise teacher, Molesworth only explicitly opens up questions that are quite within her grasp, and are, in any case, immaterial to the moral/authoritative grounding of the text. Meanwhile, it is intimated – silently, and with minimal show of authority – that a question such as "what *does* compel Griselda to say nothing?" remains beyond the bounds of analysis. This question is, in a sense, left ambiguous; one is not told baldly, didactically "children, you must not stamp your feet". The space opened up in Griselda's consciousness is, however, just big enough to admit the realisation that it is so, and that it is good. What is thus given to the reader, whether or not he/she accepts it, is the notion of an inscrutable, yet desirable discrimination that one can come to acquire oneself, without the need of badgering and rules.



Morality – or at least the virtue of self-control – is made the object of affectionate identification.

In this respect, subsequent developments mark not so much a break from the Molesworth and Nesbit methods as an elaboration of them. Adults are constantly being divided into those who understand, join in, and generally run a genial child-centred regime, and those who are authoritarian, short-sighted and generally despicable or ridiculous. Frequently, the text indicates negatively, by criticising the latter race, that it is representative of the former. C.S Lewis, halfway between Mrs Molesworth and our present-day writers, can still be seen making explicit authorial interventions in tones that chum in with the kids. His refusal to describe the full horror of an assortment of monsters is shamelessly palmed off on some notional group, known as “the grown-ups”, to which he presumably does not belong. Thus the list of monsters must end with

other creatures whom I won't describe because if I did the grown-ups would probably not let you read this book [...].<sup>42</sup>

In such a way, one assumes a pose of specious daring while remaining within the bounds of decency. The come hither to the kids is complemented admirably by thumbing a nose at the “grown-ups” – the word itself is indicative of the desired effect. Though Lewis's crassly ingratiating tone is now generally avoided, this practice persists. It is merely that methods have grown more subtle. Authorial comment will now tend not to be so readily identifiable as emanating from an adult of

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<sup>42</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1959), p.138.

any description. Thus, we are told, parents *will* pretend "not to see each other in the curious way that grown-up people sometimes do".<sup>43</sup> The narration here is in the third person, but as is often the case, identifies strongly with the central (often male) child character, to the extent of assuming the status of honorary childhood. The same approach is used elsewhere in this text, Penelope Lively's *The Revenge of Samuel Stokes*.

They did vaguely hear their parents talking about it, in the way that one does vaguely hear parents.

(*Samuel Stokes*, p.27)

The "one" that speaks is diffuse to say the least, and of confusingly indeterminate age, given that the author, Penelope Lively can safely be said to have attained her majority some time ago. We have, then, reached that epoch where adult writers have arrived at an "identification with their readers" (Briggs, 'Women Writers', p.222), and we know this because they tell us so. Yet even in this *Arcadia*, the battle between the two great adult attitudes continues unabated, on an explicit level within the text. For *The Revenge of Samuel Stokes*, like many of its peer texts, dramatises the conflict between sensible adults and their child-minded counterparts who collaborate with the children to solve the mystery that baffles any number of parents and men in suits. In this instance, the good adult is Grandpa. He is a widower, and Tim (our hero) is "extremely fond of him" on account of his "admirable ideas about how life should be arranged", ideas that have only blossomed since his wife's death. Tim's parents, on the other hand, see a need to "keep an eye on Dad" (all p.10), for grandpa is clearly a large species of child. Thus he is privileged to

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<sup>43</sup> Penelope Lively, *The Revenge of Samuel Stokes* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1983), p.15.

speak from the centre of the text and can criticise other adults' addiction to reason (pp.24,37,53,64). He and the children are of course proved right, and manage to lay the troublesome ghost of Samuel Stokes, whose activities are a mystery to the literal-minded. That the latter class includes Tim's parents is by no means incidental. For a necessity of this textual manoeuvre is the orphaning of the kids, whether literal, or as it is here and in the case of Emile, virtual. In recent kiddie-lit, parents generally form at most a vague or irritating presence, and on the rare occasion where they are fully involved, they must be rigorously distinguished from their dull, unmagical, unbelieving, unchildlike brethren. The resort to reason against patently magical happenings, that which usually sorts out sheep- from goat-parents, will be met by an infant reading of rights.

"Come off it, Angell!" groaned George. "Stop behaving like Any Other Parent!"<sup>44</sup>

In the main, however, the child's friend is a favourite uncle, or a friend, thus unencumbered by the marks of any sort of institutional authority. Similarly, he may perform the role of tutor in a Rousseauesque fashion, but must not be a prying school teacher. Indeed, the role may even be taken by another, older child. Thus, in William Mayne's influential early work, *A Grass Rope* (1957), the natural, innocent insight of the little girl Mary is vital in the pursuit of the text's quest.

Adam remembered how Nan turned conversations round so that Mary had to finish them by finding out for herself.

'I haven't seen the gate to fairyland,' he said. 'How can I tell whether it's true?'

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<sup>44</sup> Hugh Scott, *The Haunted Sand* (London: Walker, 1991), p.113.

'It's the Yat,' said Mary.<sup>45</sup>

Adam, an older child and virtual adult, learning the tutor's role from Mary's sister, surrenders his scientific superiority just long enough to draw out the wise child who will eventually solve the mystery. This quest has itself been initiated by Adam's headmaster, evidently a relaxed and enlightened educator.

'The headmaster made a bet with me that I wouldn't find out all about the hounds.'  
(Mayne, *Grass Rope*, p.29)

The headmaster, though not fleshed out in the text, is thus hinted at as the headstone in a pyramid of informal tutelary relations, down through Nan, thence to Mary. More recent works would tend to elide even this trace of educational power. Where a visible (in that he is a character) tutor is found in recent kiddie-lit, he is scrupulously decentred. A Great Uncle who is directing his nephews and niece in a grail-quest, nevertheless refuses to give them any clues.

'This is your quest,' he said. 'You must find the way every time yourselves. I am the guardian, no more. I can take no part and give you no help, beyond guarding you all the way.'<sup>46</sup>

The reader is left to conjecture some high metaphysical law in action here; the words "quest" and "guardian" nudge one in this direction. If, however, they were replaced by "lesson" and "teacher", the situation

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<sup>45</sup> William Mayne, *A Grass Rope* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.89.

<sup>46</sup> Susan Cooper, *Over Sea, Under Stone* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1968), p.108.

might begin to seem a little more mundane. For Great Uncle Merry's teaching method is strikingly child-centred. One child suspects that he has left the children alone so as to allow their curiosity full rein.

'Yes, Barney,' he said, 'I did have an idea you might find it, because I know you three very well.'

(Cooper, p.77)

The teacher's intimate knowledge of the kids is an important prerequisite of the method. With this in place, he can simply hang around until the right answer pops out.

'Gummery,' he said accusingly, 'I believe you knew all this time.'

(Cooper, p.107)

It is the above accusation that leads the guardian to reveal his method. It is interesting to note the presentation of a child's resentment at sensing a realm of withheld knowledge. Only submission to the nebulous metaphysical ideal, the assurance that the very fact that they are children is important to the quest, can make Gummery's method seem less than patronising. The child-centred teacher, openly identified *as* a teacher, appears comparatively rarely in the pages of kiddie-lit. Where it does, however, the child's feeling of being manipulated must be accommodated. The child is no fool, and will recognise blundering attempts to cajole a mile off. Thus a -- real, professional -- teacher, apparently following child-centred method to perfection, casually expanding upon a chance stimulus to see how far his pupil may be prodded without resort to explication, may be guilty of heavy-handedness.

A note of instruction crept into his voice as he went on, 'Why do you think people used to be so ready to believe in witchcraft?'<sup>47</sup>

Such a figure acts as a smoke screen distracting our attention from the possibility that he may be using much the same method as the text itself. The real teacher is thus discredited so that the text can make his method its own. Another such figure visits a hospitalized (his hand having been crushed in a boating accident) Downs Syndrome child and propounds to his mother the activity method of coming to terms with illness and mortality.

'We talked about it this morning,' said the teacher. 'I thought we shouldn't run away from it, and we've done drama, and mass-and-momentum and writing and art. And here's the card.'<sup>48</sup>

Mum's attitude to the teacher as a person is ambivalent. The latter's attempts to show her understanding of Gideon's "rich inner life" are met evasively by Mum, "not quite wanting to talk about him to a stranger" (Mayne, *Gideon*, p.73). Later, however, the teacher's methods can be used to meet quite different situations in the lives of her two youngest. Their discovery of blindworms is the springboard for activity-in-the-home.

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<sup>47</sup> Penelope Lively, *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1984), p.62.

<sup>48</sup> William Mayne, *Gideon Ahoy!* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p.73.

Mum remembered what the teacher had said the day before, and played snakes with them, did drama (pastry cakes) and made drawings.

(Mayne, *Gideon*, p.77)

A clear distinction is made between the person of the institutionally compromised teacher, and the validity of the methods suggested once they have been privatised by a suitable person. Thus, if there is explicit doubt cast on a particular teacher's ability to carry out the theory, there is a confident and discreet silence on the matter of the text's own teacherly nudges and incitations. For indeed, this role is taken by the narrative voice itself, discreet to the point of invisibility; surely the text cannot intrude, as a teacher can, certainly not while we are distracted by a cavalcade of bumbling, didactic adults?

The right-feeling parent, however, like the philanthropic legislator, will rejoice not in coercion, but in dispensing with coercion.<sup>49</sup>

Let the history of your domestic rule typify, in little, the history of our political rule [...] ending in parental abdication.

(Spencer, *Education*, p.132)

It is arguable, then, that authority has not so much disappeared from these texts as changed shape. Furthermore, this is a shape that often defines itself in the negative, in opposition to either the didactic, or clumsy, over-institutionalised child-centredness. Friendly critics have not been slow to take the message of this drama to heart. Reading Julia Briggs, one might come away with the impression that the didactic has, at least in places, been overcome, leaving an achieved liberty in its place. Kiddie-lit texts themselves, however, constantly re-enact the old opposition, suggesting that this "liberty" must be re-synthesised afresh each time it is accessed. Have we really emerged, therefore, into a period that can be so confident of its liberal qualities?

Since this is a problem that emanates from over-confident subscription to a popular and powerful, but rather loose, historical narrative, let us return to history at the point where imagination – subversive or otherwise – is presumed to be making its first appearances. It is not unusual to describe the age when Rousseau's *Emile* was an

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<sup>49</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (London: Watts, 1929), p.130 (first publ. 1861).



innocent and Romanticism was dawning, as the moment of child-liberation's first glimmerings. Thus it is to Darton that a critic turns when he wishes to relate Blake's *Songs* to educational theory and writing for children.

In the past, authors of children's literature had been largely unconscious of the principles upon which their books were based. Now, in Darton's words, those principles were either 'seen openly,' or 'strongly suspected of being there.'<sup>50</sup>

Rousseau's *Emile* comes on the scene with "a great dramatic burst" and with it a growing tendency "to soften and humanize [...] educational theory and juvenile literature" (Leader, p.5). Leader then quotes Darton further on the matter of seventeenth century puritan didactic (Leader, p.7), and goes on to trace a tradition based on original sin and the need to knock children into shape. It is here, in the evangelical tradition, that resistance to the new liberal child-sentiment is supposed to be concentrated at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Under the aegis of the Darton narrative, Leader can confidently cite Hannah More as "the most prominent of Evangelical educators" (Leader, p.9), thus a didactic figure. In the Darton-world, the villains are easily spotted. It is, nevertheless, demonstrable that Hannah More is no more guiltless of child-centred rhetoric than child-centred rhetoric is guiltless of Hannah More.

It is quite to the point that, if one were to look at More's stories intended for educational purposes, one might readily agree that they are crashingly didactic, especially where the word is taken as a synonym of boring or dry, but that an examination of her most explicit theorisation of

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<sup>50</sup> Zachary Leader, *Reading Blake's Songs* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p.5.

educational practice yields a different impression. More, ostensibly offering 'Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess' (1805), pursues a soaring trajectory from educational theory, to its efficacy in inculcating discipline, thence to the avoidance of bloody rebellion. Curiously enough, however, one could, by quoting selectively, especially from the earlier sections, give the impression that this is another prophet of educational/readerly freedom, à la Darton. For when More asserts that children should be "as much as possible, trained to their simple and consistent indications"<sup>51</sup>, and thus lays down the central tenet of paedocentric thought, she commits a strangely forgotten historical scandal. According to the script, she ought really to fulminate against giving these limbs of Satan any leeway whatsoever. Nor is this a mere unaccompanied anomaly; we also read that oral learning should be used to mitigate pedantry.

Books alone will never form the character. Mere reading would rather tend to make a pedantic, than an accomplished prince. It is conversation which must unfold, enlarge, and apply the use of books.

(More, 'Hints', p. 24)

This is remarkably similar to much that passes as child-centred, both in More's time, and in our own. We might, nevertheless, take this as a typically Puritan attack on all works of imagination. Thus, we read, the best 'Books of Amusement' are those which "may be perused with as much profit, and as little injury, as is to be expected from works of mere entertainment" (More, 'Hints', p.281), seemingly placing More on the side

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<sup>51</sup> Hannah More, 'Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess', in *The Works of Hannah More*, Vol. iv, (London: H. Fisher, R. Fisher, and P. Jackson, 1834), p.13.

of Puritan distrust of fancy. Yet, she also suggests that, if fiction is to be read, it should be "those works of pure and genuine fancy, which exercise and fill the imagination" (More, 'Hints', p.283). Darton adherents must already be confused; is this really the rhetoric of one of those Puritans whose

views on the evils associated with imagination were to affect the books provided for children for many generations.

(Gillian Avery, 'The Puritans and their Heirs', p.98)

Here is a writer who may confidently be placed in the category of "the didactic women writers", usually as part of a litany that goes something like "Sherwood, Trimmer, More" (e.g. Townsend, *Written for Children*, p.28), apparently peddling rather amiable enlightened doctrines. My point, however, is not to rehabilitate More by reversing the usual judgement, and triumphantly asserting that, indeed, Hannah More was one of the good people after all. To do this would be merely to fall into the error, to which I have already alluded, of occasionally re-shuffling awards of value within the agreed framework, and ignoring the nonsense that this makes of the stark opposition of authoritarian to subversive that is supposed to lead onwards and upwards to our present state of liberation. For More's suggestions *are* puzzling and contradictory, and ought to be presented as such.

Rather, what impresses one is More's assimilation of child-slanted ideas to a system that is not intended as liberatory. She does suggest a discreet role for the teacher, the mere mention of which ought surely to have shocked her Puritan heart to the core. For such teacherly discretion

is, as usual, placed in opposition to rote learning and didacticism. Education, according to More

is not to be effected by cold rules and formal reflections; by insipid dogmas, and tedious sermonizing. It should be done so indirectly, so discreetly, and so pleasantly, that the pupil shall not be led to dread a lecture at every turn [...]. Topics must not be so much proposed as insinuated.

('Hints', p.25)

Here, however, we come to the crux of the matter, for this teacherly discretion, as one might already suspect from the word "insinuated", spills over into frank surveillance. Once one has thus lulled the child into a false sense of security, one should

watch attentively [...] in hours of relaxation [...] when caution is dismissed [...] and control [relaxed]. [...] When vigilance appears to sleep, it should be particularly on the alert.

('Hints', p.28)

More is quite undisturbed by the element of spying, and equally clear as to its purpose: control and discipline. For that law was better that tended "to keep men in their places [...] than the free scope which was afforded to turbulent ambitions" in Greek democracy ('Hints', p.52). More differs from a modern exponent of child-centred theory in that she sees in its techniques an ideal method of disciplining a child, instilling in it "self-command and early habitual self-denial" and "patience [...] under postponed and restricted gratification" ('Hints', p.10).

Furthermore, More has distinct social aims that extend well beyond the classroom and nursery. Firstly, this appears as a text specifically concerned with the education of a princess, though "adapted to the sex rather than to the circumstances of the princess" ('Hints', p.v). Yet, in spite of an apology for "presumption" (p.iv) in so doing, More's sub-text is a constant and thinly veiled challenge to the monarchy.<sup>52</sup> Louis XIV is offered as a bad example of government (p.30), and royalty are reminded that, in Britain, they are citizens first, and monarchs second (pp.32-3). They are, thus, not above the law, but vital to its preservation. Conversely, the law is vital to the preservation of the monarchy.

It should be assiduously inculcated, that the LAWS form the very basis of the throne; the root and ground-work of the monarch's political existence.

('Hints', p.41)

In this contention, More is arguably as much bourgeois as "Puritan", or rather, her view of a constitutional monarchy based on accountability rather than absolutism is in line with contemporaneous thinking from protestant, dissenting, bourgeois positions. The monarch can thus be given a civic responsibility whose effects can be traced as they echo down through the various levels of society.

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<sup>52</sup> Indeed, 'Hints' was initially published anonymously, but the identity of the author was guessed, and the work itself was fortunately well received by the Queen and her adviser the Bishop of Exeter; see William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, Vol. iii, 2nd edn (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1834), pp.217-226.

A prince is "the maker of manners;" and as he is the model of the court, so is the court the model of the metropolis, and the metropolis of the rest of the kingdom.

(*Hints*, p.218)

This process takes as its basic unit the family: "the state is justly considered as made up of an aggregate of particular families" (p.68). It is thus in the domestic virtues that the state will find respite from the "sensuality" that was Rome's downfall (p.71). It will be noted with what elegance More's seemingly diffuse argument moves between top tips for the classroom, to advice to every class of society. It will be noticed, also, that the argument moves swiftly from one dedicated to the female mind of a princess, and thus, legitimately (even for non-Puritans) concerned with controlling the passions, to one concerned with non-gender specific monarchs (e.g. "prince" p.24 & p.218 quoted above), thence to the monarchy and the rule of law in general. The monarchy is addressed formally as the conduit through which manners are to be diffused, an idea with particular resonance in the years immediately following 1789. It is also, implicitly, cast as the mother of the state, charged with the responsibility of controlling her children through discreet example. The result of the shift in More's argument is thus an extension, via the family, of the legitimate suppression of and by woman to the lower orders in general, and at the same time to the higher. All levels of society will enter into mutual contracts that will render them accountable to each other, while preserving their difference. Thus the non-revolutionary bourgeoisie lays down the gauntlet of democracy, taking a version of child-centred tutelage as its basic model of a power relation.

For what is ultimately sought is the preservation of an existing order, one which has "annihilated the distinction of separate interests"

('Hints', p.57) in society, thus remarkably extinguishing the class struggle some years before Marx could project its future role. Not for the last time in the nineteenth century, education is the platform for a plea for amelioration, aimed at avoiding revolution. If the people are not brought, by religion, to an acceptance of their class and lot (p.169), and the "adherence to the cause of civil order" (p.171) is not secured, vice will leave lower classes "the blind tools of political incendiaries" (p.176). For "it is the voluptuous, the prodigal, the licentious who are the needy, the unsettled, and the discontented, who love change, and promote disturbance" (p.201), to wit – subversion.

Thus far, it might be retorted that More is a transitional figure, one caught between the didactic and child-centred tendencies, and that, while she represents an interesting anomaly, her application of what does indeed look, in places, a little like child-centred theory in no way influences or reflects subsequent developments. The didactic/liberal opposition would merely need to realign itself with an extra chapter on the gradual nature of this great shift in consciousness. Unfortunately, a consideration of the subsequent trajectory of these theories suggests otherwise.

Though the name of Matthew Arnold is more familiar in this context, it was Dr J.P. Kay (later Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth) who sowed the seeds of state education in Britain. In his task he was greatly influenced by the theories of Pestalozzi, and as such was a pioneer of child-centred theory in this country.

"Nothing has been taught dogmatically," he wrote, "but everything by the combination of the simplest elements: i.e. the course which a discoverer must have trod has been followed; and the way in which truths have been ascertained pointed out by synthetical demonstration of each successive step."<sup>53</sup>

Kay is a truly modern figure, in the precise sense that his writings from the 1830-50s do indeed seem to presage much that is still considered current in educational theory. There is indeed a shock of anachronism in

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<sup>53</sup> Frank Smith, *The Life and Works of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth* (London: John Murray, 1923), p.108.



discovering that battles still apparently being fought had an origin contemporaneous with the beginnings of state education in Britain. Kay visited a number of experimental establishments and took the best of what he saw in action as the basis of his own practice. Thus, he was impressed by Wood in Edinburgh who

had emphasised the importance of intelligence, understanding, and interest as against mechanism, memorising, and drill, oral questioning as against book questioning [...].

(Smith, pp.48-9)

Thus, rote learning, often identified as Victorian, is already under attack. Play was also to be important as demonstrated by Stow in Glasgow.

While not neglecting instruction he had developed a "system," which recognised that habits were as important as knowledge, and the playground, "the uncovered schoolroom," as important as the school.

(Smith, p.49)

From existing pauper schools, he took the idea of setting inmates to useful tasks.

At Hackney Wick he found juvenile delinquents engaged in repairing their dilapidated buildings, and learning the use of familiar tools, and was greatly impressed by the value of practical exercises in training pauper children for a life of honest labour.

(Smith, pp.51-2)

Even the phonics system of reading, which is sometimes thought of as a horrible invention of the 1960s, was adopted by this sober early Victorian gentleman (Smith, p.53). And so, in 1838, Kay produced a report ('On the training of Pauper Children, and on District Schools', Poor Law Commission, *Fourth Annual Report* pp.228-265) that still impresses his biographer, Frank Smith, in 1923. Stressing

the importance of composition based on oral lessons, of geography lessons beginning in the locality, of singing, of the playground and gymnastic exercises, of interest as a motive superior to the fear of punishment – the report is almost a manual of teaching.

(Smith, p.54)

The shift from didactic to child-centred, activity method is clear. Nor is this a shift effected without theoretical motivation; Kay was an admirer of Pestalozzi and had met his disciples on the continent (e.g. Vehrli; see Smith, p.63). Smith notes that though Kay was guilty of a common misconception of the Swiss pioneer in putting a too formal arrangement of graded steps of learning before the child, yet he had "imbibed something that was of far greater importance, and that was the spirit of Pestalozzi himself" (Smith, pp.66-67). That Kay had indeed absorbed the theory, and not merely a detached practice, is even clearer when one examines his thinking beyond the teaching of children proper.

In the thought of Dr Kay, indeed, the paedocentric tutelary relation is an organising principle of not only the tutor/pupil relation, but of all power relations involving two classes separated by degree of knowledge. In the paedocentric universe, little tutors have bigger tutors, and so ad infinitum. For Kay's teachers themselves had already benefited from this

system of government in their own education, as teachers, at Battersea, under the discreet, fatherly eye of Kay himself. There, Kay would "never assume a tone of authority" but "rather suggested new views for reflection".

"In this way I found that, without appearing to direct the opinions of the whole body of masters, they were gradually moulded on my own [...]."

(Smith, p.110)

While Kay shares a certain pride in this method with a modern such as Razzell, it should be noted that he is, like Hannah More, not shy of its more dictatorial possibilities. Subsequently, the inspectors who will observe the performance of the teachers were to stand, at another remove, in the tutorial role.

They were to stimulate, not to compel. The theory of inspection that arose in a later day, and which created and maintained a false and harmful relationship between teachers and inspectors, was not Dr. Kay's [...]. Inspectors were instructed not "to offer any advice or information excepting where it is invited."

(Smith, p.97)

The distinction is not between liberation and domination, but between different levels of subtlety with which inspectors might insinuate a course of action. In this way, they would encourage "self-help" (Smith, p.97) on the part of the schools. The familial nature of this mode of hierarchy (Smith, p.106) is often stressed as a vital element; and as a family it has the advantage of being extendable back through a number of generations, whilst leaving each individual power relation entirely personal and practical in its form of appearance.

The expediency of, and a pride in, the tutelary role resound throughout Kay's educational thought. Wherever authority is to manifest itself in the form of a transfer of information, or the guidance of ideas, Kay's debt to continental child-centred theory (particularly Pestalozzi and his followers) becomes apparent. We have then the appearance of a theory rooted in the classroom which subsequently finds applications in other relationships of a very loosely educational nature. . . . From the "modern" (in 1923) standpoint of Frank Smith, Kay is seen as the herald of a modern approach to education; the prescience of his theories seems all the greater for the fact that what he campaigned for is now the norm. Thus, for example, Kay's justification of educational excursions "now seems superfluous, but [...] at the time of writing was a piece of educational insight" (Smith, p.108). In short, it is tempting to view Kay as part of a continuous genealogy of purely educational reform, which has as its sole aim the liberalisation of the school; this is how he appears to Frank Smith.

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Thus far, I have more or less gone along with this notion that Kay took a theory designed for the classroom and extended its effectiveness to related fields, much as Hannah More seems to do. If my explication were to stop here, one might be left with a picture of a more or less benevolent teaching practice spreading out into society, gradually permeating, and thus softening, power relations as it went. Yet Kay did not start out his public career as an educationalist, nor is child-centred educational theory *per se* the unique source of the tutelary relation in his thinking. To prove this latter assertion, it is necessary to look at Kay's earlier career, particularly that which immediately preceded, and indeed precipitated, his interest in education.

Kay's devotion to education was first inspired by his philanthropic investigations into the moral condition of the working classes, and was subsequently developed from his role as Poor Law Commissioner. This shift in public function is not as tangential as it might appear, as a brief examination of his philanthropic investigations into the poor of Manchester will show. The opening words of this investigation recommend it as a contribution to society's self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge, inculcated by the maxim of the ancient philosopher, is a precept not less appropriate to societies than to individuals.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> James Phillips Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 2nd edn enlarged [1832] (Manchester: E.J. Morton, 1969), p.17.

The subject of "society", as soon becomes apparent, is distinctly bourgeois; for it is the bourgeoisie's burden to gain knowledge and understanding of its hitherto ignored nether regions, the working classes. Thence springs "the importance of minutely investigating the state of the working classes" (Kay, p.14). Such an investigative imperative is often presented thus, as a prerequisite of reform, in anthropologically-minded philanthropic thought of the nineteenth century. An early exponent of the theory was Malthus, who complains of the lack of a history of the lower classes. Standard history, we are told, is insufficient, as it concentrates on large-scale interactions of nations (war, government etc.) which are apparently irrelevant to the lower orders; hence, "the histories of mankind that we possess are histories only of the higher classes".<sup>55</sup> A history of the lower classes will require a new method.

A satisfactory history of this kind, on one people, and of one people, and of one period, would require the constant and minute attention of an observing mind during a long life. Some of the objects of inquiry would be, in what proportion to the number of adults was the number of marriages, to what extent vicious customs prevailed in consequence of the constraints upon matrimony [...].

(Malthus, p.78)

The purpose of this friendly surveillance is to learn the language and mores of the lower classes, who are assumed to be something of a dark continent. Because "we" do not recognize their ways, we are morally obliged to inform ourselves. Schools Inspectors such as Henry Moseley, a colleague of Kay, often seem to see this as part of their natural function.

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1970), p.78.

The fact is that the inner life of the classes below us in society is never penetrated by us. We are profoundly ignorant of the springs of public opinion, the elements of thought and the principles of action amongst them -- those things which we

recognize at once as constituting our own social life, in all the moral features which give to it form and substance.<sup>56</sup>

All this is, of course, expressed in terms of a curious mixture of sympathy and condemnation for the depravity into which the lower classes, factory operatives in particular, are sunk. Subsequently, the bourgeois philanthropist will to be able to address them intelligibly on the matter of improving (according to bourgeois standards) their conduct. Throughout his investigation, Kay is concerned to promote inter-class relations on a personal level, man to man.

By visiting the houses of the operatives, he [the capitalist] might advise the multiplication of household comforts and the culture of the domestic sympathies.

(Kay p.100)

The Poor Law is seen by the Malthusian Kay as largely responsible for destroying the originals of such relations.

Charity once extended an invisible chain of sympathy between the higher and lower ranks of society, which has been destroyed by the luckless pseudo-philanthropy of the law.

(Kay p.48)

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<sup>56</sup> Henry Moseley, *Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education*, (H.M. Inspectors of Schools, 1845), i, pp.266-7 (qu. in Richard Johnson, 'Educational Policy and Social Control in Early Victorian England', *Past & Present*, 49 (1970), 96-119 (p.104)).



Thus we have lost

that acknowledged right to administer good counsel, and that willingness to receive advice – that privilege of inquiring into the arrangements of domestic economy, instructing the ignorant, and checking the perverse [...].

(Kay p.50)

The problems of reforging such a bond are often treated by Malthusian philanthropy as problems of address; it is simply a matter of knowing the right language and tone in which to communicate what is, in itself, clearly sound advice.

Nothing is rarer than to exert an influence on the poor that is not the result of fear or expectation, and yet this is the thing that is absolutely necessary. So it is a matter of persuading them that they are entirely free to refuse what we are asking of them. This will not be easy. The uneducated proletarian will take our request as a command to be obeyed. If he is an independent sort, he will resent what he perceives as an interference in his affairs and will think he sees an aristocratic pretension in the advice given to him. Advice is the act that evinces the most equality since it follows at the same time from the desire to influence in the one who gives it and from the perfect freedom of the one who receives it.<sup>57</sup>

Jacques Donzelot, who quotes the above as an instance of Malthusian theory, suggests that in France it was this form of

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Dupin, *L'Ouvrière* (1828) (qu. in Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Hutchinson, 1980), p.65). The, feminine, "ouvrière" of the title is by no means a casual slip. As Donzelot frequently points out, and as we have already seen in More's "Flints", the mother provides a ready-made metaphor and conduit for these sorts of relations.

philanthropy that "gained acceptance for its proposals on the question of assistance and eventually got them incorporated into most of the procedures of transformation of the social body" (Donzelot, p.63). In Britain as in France, *mutatis mutandis*, one of the most important of these procedures was, unsurprisingly, education. For Kay, it is but a short step from his Malthusian investigation to education as the means of forming the sorts of relations desired by Dupin.

A general and efficient system of education would be devised – a more intimate and cordial association would be cultivated between the capitalist and those in his employ – the poor would be instructed in habits of forethought and economy.

(Kay, p.93)

The ultimate aim is precisely that noted earlier in Hannah More; a process of softening divisions is thought of as necessary to avoid confrontation or even revolution (a spectre that hovers around the various industrial troughs and crises of the nineteenth century, fleshed out by threats such as the French Revolution, the Chartist Movement, and later Marxist socialism). Power is diffused via the inculcation of self-discipline, and the various correlate "self-" qualities. We are to understand that the explicit, heavy-handed use of power will no longer work. As E.L. Burney notes in his 'Foreword' to *The Moral and Physical Condition*, Kay realised that

the process of reform and amelioration combined with justice and mutual understanding could succeed where subjugation and repression must fail.

(Kay, p.ii)

This idea is something of a commonplace amongst Kay's contemporaries. As one anonymous correspondent puts it

penal statutes may make those who are ignorant [...] unwillingly respect, for a while, the right of property; whereas an instructed population willingly respect it for their own sakes, and because they know it is essential to their welfare.<sup>58</sup>

It was equally this notion that influenced Kay's later adherence to continental paedocentric theories. Some similarities in the broad social thinking of Kay and More become apparent. Whatever their other differences, here are two early-nineteenth century bourgeois concerned with harnessing a perceived historical shift from absolutism to a softer model of power relations, thus hopefully averting revolution. It is no exaggeration to state that this shift is the great motor behind the beginnings of national education, and indeed that paedocentric theory arrives on the scene as an ideal method of managing the lower classes in a new political climate.

None of this is intended to detract from the material achievements of philanthropy in the nineteenth century, or the possibilities for further reform that even Kay's limited concession to the lower orders afforded. He clearly sees this as a necessary prerequisite for the participatory democracy which has subsequently been achieved. Kay was amongst those who believed that the Reform Act of 1867, with its broadening of popular manhood suffrage, necessitated a programme of national education.

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<sup>58</sup> Anon., 'Reasons for Establishing a Public System of Elementary Instruction in England', *Quarterly Journal of Education*, vol 1 (1831), 213-18 (repr. in J.M. Goldstrom, *Education: Elementary Education 1780-1900* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), pp.77-83 (p.81)).

The announcements of the intentions of the Government are a natural consequence of the recent great extension of electoral power among the classes supported by manual labour.<sup>59</sup>

Citing "the anti-social doctrines held by the leaders of Trades' Unions as to the relations of capital and labour, and their consequent organization to limit the freedom of workmen and masters by a system of terror", Kay believes a system of education would be influential in "rearing a loyal, intelligent, and Christian population" (*Memorandum*, p.6). The word "rearing" makes it clear that the function of education will be to catch the working classes in childhood, before other influences can get to them. It is but a short leap from this, however, to thinking of the working classes in general as a species of children. This, indeed, is an easy ellipsis in nineteenth century thinking where "child" can quite easily signify that which is in need of socialisation.

Indeed, no less a liberal thinker than Mill makes a distinction between those theories which seek to genuinely empower the poor, and those which use a semblance of sympathy as a means of creating a new version of authority; one that functions through deference rather than fear. Strikingly, he characterises the latter in terms of parent to child relations.

The relationship between rich and poor, according to this theory (a theory also applied to the relation between men and women), should be only partly

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<sup>59</sup> Sir James Kay Shuttleworth, *Memorandum on Popular Education* (London: Ridgway Picadilly, 1868; repr. London: Woburn, 1969), p.5.

authoritative: it should be amiable, moral, and sentimental: affectionate tutelage on the one side, respectful and grateful deference on the other. The rich should be *in loco parentis* to the poor, guiding and restraining them like children.<sup>60</sup>

Though Mill is criticising such a conception of class relations, it is interesting to note with what confidence and facility he can draw on the worker/child, state/family analogies. Furthermore, adult/child relations are taken, here, as the already-existing ground on which these analogies are based.

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<sup>60</sup> John Stuart Mill, 'The Probable Futurity of the Labouring Classes', from *The Principles of Political Economy* (added to 3rd edn, 1852) (qu. in *Nature and Industrialization*, ed. by Alasdair Clayre (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.278).

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Having said this, how far does the interpenetration of these concepts go the other way; how far does the idea of class relations inform the liberatory tradition of educational theory? It may after all be objected that Kay, for instance, misappropriates Pestalozzi, whose stock as a forefather of child-centredness is still fairly high. Sadly, this is not the case. Pestalozzi's application of his theories to the lower classes is similarly theorized. Their *beatus ille* is that earned by acceptance of their lot.

Happy is he who can bring his desires within the measure of his means, and who can resign to every individual selfish wish, without giving up his content and repose [...].<sup>61</sup>

As is clear from the 'The Swansong', this state is to be achieved through a particular sort of education.

The happiness of the wage-earning classes depends entirely upon their practical capacity. Extensive knowledge has little to offer them.

(Pestalozzi, p.321)

The *method*, however will be the same as that employed for the bourgeois child. As 'The Swansong' also suggests, under the heading 'Different Education needed by Different Classes', the child of the lower classes will be encouraged to think and so forth, to develop naturally. For

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<sup>61</sup> Henry Pestalozzi, *Pestalozzi's Educational Writings*, trans. and ed. by J.A. Green and Frances A. Collie (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), p.261. Further references to this edition will be given in the form; (Pestalozzi, p.x).

him, however, the outcome will be the cheerful acceptance of his lot, which he will ideally feel to be just, and not a matter of "restrictions".

He learns to think about the things which are provocative of thought; he learns to do, to wish, hope, believe and strive in relation to the actualities of his life. His powers develop in harmony with his life's needs. His father's home, his father's social position, etc., are dear to him, and he shares the burden of them willingly. He does not feel the restrictions placed upon him; they have become habits. We do not make a dreamer of him - one who has lost all sense of reality, and is unfit for the duties of his station.

(Pestalozzi, p.320)

Kay has merely taken up these ideas, and used them to forge a friendly oppression of working class children in Britain. The middle class child will also, it is true, be brought by a similar method to the acceptance of *his* station, but the reader will, I hope, agree, that this does not amount to quite the same thing in the event. In any case, no matter what the class, the aim is only partially liberatory, in a way similar to that already described in relation to Hannah More. To learn, the child must be given a hand in its own education.

Let the child not only be acted upon, but let him be an *agent* in intellectual education.

(Pestalozzi, p.249)

Yet, what is to be learned by children of all classes includes self-denial modelled on the passive mother.

Of all the moral habits which may be formed by a judicious education, that of self-denial is the most difficult to acquire, and the most beneficial when adopted [...].

(Pestalozzi, p.219)

Of course, once again, this theory is distinguishable from its practice precisely by the fact that it must -- increasingly, I would suggest, in direct proportion to the degree of liberalisation of society -- minimise any signs that would suggest to the pupil that the plan was ever to inculcate such values. The pupil will become an agent in his own *socialisation*. The philanthropist or teacher who follows the procedures outlined above is involved in a highly fictive practice. Indeed, he is even a method actor, spending a great deal of time getting inside his characters before plunging himself into their midst. Once there, he will disseminate moral notions that will, he hopes, produce the thrifty, abstemious, docile breed needed by democratic capitalism; but he will be cunningly disguised as a good and generous friend, merely offering advice. There are thus, in the first half of the nineteenth century, two texts; that which outlines investigative results and theorises a certain form of address, and that which is offered, whether in pamphlet form, or in person, to the workers and *practises* the said address. Like Emile, the workers must never read the first, theoretical text. For friendly advice must seem spontaneous and personal if it is to work. If it once appears instrumental in the pursuit of a class-defined project, it falls back into the didactic. Better still, Kay, like Pestalozzi, advocated a system whereby one

selected from the classes immediately in contact with the people, and generally from children of the manual-labour class, their future instructors -- ensuring an identity of interest and harmonious sympathies.

(Kay, *Memorandum*, p.8)



Such a system relies on the facility with which the new softer relations will permeate the agent's practice, reproducing, down through generations, a spontaneous subjectivity. What is thus produced is a form of social amnesia, wherein the class/authority-oriented plan that initially produces a form of relation is forgotten in favour of its own public face. As with any ideological operation of this sort, this forgetting opens up the possibility both of smooth reproduction and of deviant projects that capitalise on the degree of relative autonomy afforded. One cannot, therefore, simply discount the possibility of a degree of liberation. I would suggest, nevertheless, that the absolute presumption of a liberatory shift implicit in the Darton narrative is a dangerous fantasy, especially in as far as it is dependent on a method that seeks to mystify the workings of power, thus making them unavailable for interrogation. This is all the more so, given paedocentric theory's emphasis on method and form over content, which will become clearer in the following chapter.

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Clearly, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the education of the child, and the education of the working classes are governed by closely inter-related discourses. In the 1850s concrete links are still apparent, at least to the brickmaker in Dickens's *Bleak House*.

Have I read the little book wot you left? No, I an't read the little book wot you left. There an't nobody here as knows how to read it; and if there wos, it wouldn't be suitable to me. It's a book fit for a babby, and I'm not a babby.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, both types of text had often been written by the same authors – see, for instance, Hannah More's 'Tales for the Common People' (*Collected Works*, vol.ii, 1834). Though the two practices have since parted company, and forgotten – under the vague rubric "didactic" – that their liaison ever happened, at least for the duration of the nineteenth century, links are clear. Indeed, one and the same text may serve both functions. Thus, Charlotte Yonge's *A Book of Golden Deeds* (1864) sets out to provide enough contextual/historical material "to make the situation comprehensible, even without knowledge of the general history."

This has been done in the hope that these extracts may serve as a mother's storehouse for reading aloud to her boys, or that they may be found useful for short readings to the intelligent, though uneducated classes.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.158.

<sup>63</sup> Charlotte M. Yonge, *A Book of Golden Deeds: Of All Times and All Lands* (London: Dent, 1908), p.2.

Such a formula supports the notion that the education of the adult poor is a correlate, or even extension, of the mother's legitimate sphere of action over her children. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, improving literature for the working classes has been largely supplanted by state education, nascent social services and popular newspapers, whereas kiddie-lit is only really beginning.

What happens, then, to produce the lady writers at the century's close who are supposed to set the liberatory trend rolling, writing exclusively for children? Have these women fought free of class-based projects, not to mention gender positionings, to gain autonomy as writers for children pure and simple, *litterateurs*? This, indeed, is what Julia Briggs suggests when she charts progress from those earlier writers subject to "economic pressures" and "attitudes to women" ('Women Writers', p.223), towards E. Nesbit, who has "found a way of articulating her feelings of rebelliousness and subversiveness as a woman" (p.248). If we consider that liberation consists in escaping "the pressure to write like a man" (p.248), then this progress probably stands. If, on the other hand, we consider the mother as the very type of the new soft educator, then the implied positive, writing like a woman, takes on a different aspect. As for escaping economic pressures, Briggs cannot deny that Nesbit "had been supporting her family by turning out hackwork for children" before *The Treasure Seekers* (p.245), but sees her subsequent output as a subversion thereof, pastiching its conventions to form a "frame-breaking self-commentary" (p.245).

As purely formal arguments posing as politically-informed critique go, this may stand. Thus, for instance, *Five Children and It* may be said to pastiche the giving of wishes, as the children stumble from one ineptly

expressed desire to another. Nevertheless, a thoroughly conventional moral does emerge from each episode, if in a soft and comical form. Hence,

now they had had two wishes, Beauty and Wealth, and neither had exactly made them happy.<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, one may find something that looks like gender role satire.

It had been agreed that Robert should be spokesman, because in books it is always the gentlemen who buy horses, and not ladies [...].

(Nesbit, *Five Children and It*, p.55)

As usual, however, Nesbit's main criticism of maleness is that boys are always bossy. Girls, on the other hand, are generally more faithful, quiet creatures.

You can always make girls believe things much easier than you can boys.

(*Five Children and It*, p.33)

The tone here is not of criticism, but that of a mother sticking up for the girls, whose faith in the Psammead's power is indeed vindicated. Nesbit has, in fact, quite a clear idea of what little girls are, and it is one that is not too distant, a few ripped stockings and muddy boots aside, from the conventional view of her contemporaries. Nesbit's real innovation is a formal, child-centred one; to constantly stress what is allowed, leaving

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<sup>64</sup> E. Nesbit, *Five Children and It* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1959), p.63.

interdictions to emerge as if spontaneously. Thus when we are told of "a sensible father, who did not forbid them to carry matches, as some boys' fathers do" <sup>65</sup>, we need not even ask, what about the girls; they are simply *out of the question*. Or rather, they have their own positions within other questions, that is to say, positive roles *as girls*, worthy of the highest praise. When a clumsy brother has torn a hole in the magic carpet, one might be angry,

but Anthea was a really first-class sister. She did not say a word till she had got out the [...] darning-needle and the thimble and the scissors, and by that time she had been able to get the better of her natural wish to be thoroughly disagreeable [...].

(Nesbit, *Phoenix*, p.199)

For ultimately Anthea too will graduate from "first-class sister" to be one of those mothers, who "are not angels, though a good many of them come pretty near it" (Nesbit, *Phoenix*, p.80). In effect, the old ideologies of gentle domestic government are consolidating their position, and addressing a larger literate population than ever before. The sorts of formal development noted by Briggs are merely part of the game.

George Gissing's *The New Grub Street* (1891) offers us a characteristically cynical account of this cusp moment in the production of these two literatures, again by women. They are to be carried out by the same hand, and though they are subtly differentiated, spring from the same social conditions. Jasper Milvain, an insouciant hack, firstly suggests writing for children as a suitable career for his sisters.

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<sup>65</sup> E. Nesbit, *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1959), p.51.

'But it's obvious what an immense field there is for anyone who can just hit the taste of the new generation of Board school children. Mustn't be too goody-goody; that kind of thing is falling out of date. But you'd have to cultivate a particular kind of vulgarity.'<sup>66</sup>

He is, in effect, playing off against each other two of the products of the liberalisation of education. His sisters, since they are lower middle class women, have received "an intellectual training wholly incompatible with the material conditions of their life" (Gissing, p.38). To counterbalance this, there is the mass of Board School children, or "the quarter-educated" (Gissing, *passim*). The former are ideally placed to cater for the cultural needs of the latter. According to Gissing's account, then, the rejection of the "goody-goody", far from representing an act of subversion, emanates from condescension, and issues in hackwork. A further distinction, however, needs to be made, between the role of Jasper and that of his sister Dora. For Jasper provides only the analysis suggesting a gap in the market and how it might be filled; it is left to Dora (and her less sweet sister Maud) to produce the texts. Dora (and, to a lesser extent, the less sweet Maud) complies with Jasper, though without signalling how far she takes on board his cynicism. The question of sincerity, and the possibility that Dora might not produce mere copy, is left open.

The disjunction between the massive, impersonal motivation of the market and that of individual writers, and their mediation via a disingenuous philanthropic piety, is even more clearly represented in a

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<sup>66</sup> George Gissing, *The New Grub Street* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.33.

second scheme, to provide the adult quarter-educated with a gossip rag that seems to eerily prefigure our own present-day *Hellos!*. This time it is Whelpdale, another hack, who provides the market theory that is to be manipulated.

'I would have the paper address itself to the quarter-educated; that is to say, the great new generation that is being turned out by the Board schools, the young men and women who can just read, but are incapable of sustained attention.'

(Gissing, p.485)

Dora registers a well-meaning emotional objection.

'Surely these poor, silly people oughtn't to be encouraged in their weakness.'

(Gissing, p.485)

Whelpdale cleverly inserts an educational purpose that is quite superfluous to his own plan.

'It *might* encourage in some of them a taste for reading -- don't you think?'

'It might,' assented Dora, musingly. 'And in that case it would be doing good!'

(Gissing, p.486)

Having thus tested the water, Whelpdale tentatively elaborates the theory of drawing the ignorant into thinking with the bait of sensational bite-sized thoughtlessness.

'And then, you know,' added Whelpdale, glancing anxiously at Dora, 'when people had been attracted by these devices, they would find a few things that were really

profitable. We would give nicely written little accounts of exemplary careers, of heroic deeds, and so on.'

(Gissing, pp.486-7)

Dora will serve as an emblem for anyone who, not by inclination a hack, and therefore unable to avow their vocation as does Jasper, needs to feel she is toeing the right line. In *The New Grub Street*, Gissing is greatly concerned to show how social forces position writers, and the rhetorics that mediate this process. Being itself a fiction, *The New Grub Street*, of course, *proves* nothing. I would nevertheless suggest that, in showing a contemporary awareness of the sorts of forces and rhetorics I have been describing, it points up a gap in Briggs's account. For what she presents as an escape from the cycle of social determination may be nothing more than a recapitulation of the rhetoric used to efface it; that is to say, she is an involuntary Whelpdale. If one accepts, with Althusser, that this invisible, disavowed operation of power is characteristic of our epoch, Briggs, in succumbing to its liberatory claims, delivers herself entirely into its hands.

As in the case of Dora, none of this is achieved without some effort. A final anecdote will suffice to reveal some of the anxieties that lie beneath current trumpetings of the unproblematic liberatory. In the 1965 and 1974 editions of *Written for Children*, John Rowe Townsend says of himself, in the third person



John Rowe Townsend wrote about children from the poorest kind of home; not only materially but spiritually poor.<sup>67</sup>

These would seem to resemble Dora's "poor, silly people". By 1990, however, this plainly sounded too distant, too didactic, or too openly philanthropic. For in the edition of that year, the passage has strikingly changed.

John Rowe Townsend – forced many years ago into the use of his middle name to distinguish him from another John Townsend – wrote about city streets similar to those he knew as a child.<sup>68</sup>

Recanting his previous stance of detached philanthropic concern, he has moved to a more personal, less patronising description of his own position. Indeed, so eager is the later, roots-seeking Townsend to distance himself from the bourgeoisie that he offers an apology for using his middle name – Rowe – presumably anxious that it shouldn't be taken as a snobbish double barrel. Meanwhile, the main text in question – *Gumble's Yard* (1961) – remains, in substance, the same, a story about parentless working class kids deserted by their drunken, slatternly guardians. Indeed, Townsend's earlier position may in some respects be closer to the truth of the text. For this is a question of critical discourse, its imagined relation to the social, and how this in turn affects the writing and reading

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<sup>67</sup> John Rowe Townsend, *Written for Children: An Outline of English-Language Children's Literature*, rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Kestrel, 1974), p.268.

<sup>68</sup> John Rowe Townsend, *Written for Children* (London: Bodley Head, 1990), p.252. Please note that all citations in the shortened form – Townsend, *Written for Children* – apply to this latter edition.

of texts within a given field. One may sympathise with Townsend as a scion of the working class trying to find a position in a predominantly middle class world – that of kiddie-lit – just as one recognizes E. Nesbit's position as a woman in a particular era. What should not, however, go unnoticed is the tension that lies within his avowals, and those of others, that what he is dealing in is "pure" literature. At the same time, the grounds from which the universal literariness of these liberatory gestures are, in the present instance, argued will be of the profoundest consequence in understanding the forms which they take in their present incarnation, and the importance of the child therein.

## chapter two

# Simplicity and a Wealth of Meaning

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Childhood has its own ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling.

(*Émile*, p.35)

In the preceding, I have sought to problematise the *disposition* of authority in the kiddie-lit text. My discussion has, thus far, centred on the explicit destination of authority in character or narrative voice, for the sterling reason that this is indeed what many kiddie-crits themselves do. More needs to be said, therefore, of what is supposed to happen once one has thus disposed, or disposed of, the author. Let us return briefly to Julia Briggs's manifesto, with which I started. Briggs claims that when adult power is effaced, texts progress to an "identification with their readers" ('Women Writers', p.222). Some such claim is frequently made, as is its corollary, that this allows children to identify in turn with the adult-produced text. According to Julia Eccleshare, the classics, "the giants in the field", are those which, regardless of genre, enable

children to identify with the story by offering them something which is emotionally timeless, universal and comprehensible. For this, an absolute understanding of a child's perspective is essential.

(Eccleshare, *Treasure Islands*, p.65)

Similarly, for Briggs, the success of a text depends on how much "the writer can remember or observe of the state of childhood" ('Women Writers', p.223). It seems that, for both critics, childhood is a fixed, universal state. Eccleshare's rhetoric is rather more bloated – timeless, universal, absolute – yet both rely on the concept of a definable "state of childhood" that does not seem to be subjectively or socially contingent, and which, once attained, will withstand the passing of the years. There is, it would seem, an essential core of childhood that survives all social

transformations. Nor is this core speechless; indeed, it has a voice, the rediscovery of which has been important in the liberation of the child. For once the author has effaced his adultness, it is this voice that will naturally take its place. This will be the voice not of a character or even of the author, but of the very text itself.

Keith Thomas has suggested that, since children have been a "muted group" until very recently, hidden attitudes "excavated by the historian"<sup>1</sup> might provide the basis for a true knowledge of childhood, regardless of whatever social constraints might have sought to bury it.

A true history of childhood must tell us how children themselves saw the world, what *they* did and what *they* felt.

(Thomas, pp.47-48)

Thus, Thomas seeks to distinguish himself from the approach favoured since Ariès<sup>2</sup> of merely outlining adult attitudes towards children. Of course, there is a problem here, in that there is a distinct absence of historical documentation by the children and for the children. Thomas firmly believes, however, that such a record can be reconstructed by research such as that conducted by the Opies in *The Language and Lore of Schoolchildren*,<sup>3</sup> which traces a continuity in the oral tradition of children's playground rhymes.

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Thomas, 'Children in Early Modern England', in *Children and their Books*, pp.45-77, (p.47).

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> Iona and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959; repr. 1960).

They suggest by implication that there was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a children's subculture which has yet to be reconstructed.

(Thomas, p.51)

For Thomas, didacticism could never wholly destroy the original genius of childhood, as "children are not just passive or assimilative recipients of grown-up instruction" (p.51) and "neither work nor school could wholly curb youthful spirits" (p.65). Thomas's argument is thus working towards another declaration, this time given some slim historical credibility, of a constant core of autonomous child culture, wherein he finds evidence that "children have their own model of reality, largely independent of that of adults" (p.51). The recovery of this world view in history is of an importance that leads Thomas to struggle against the dismal lack of vocalisation that one might expect from what he himself concedes is a muted group. In the event, Thomas relies rather more heavily on adult report of childhood – whether through recollection or observation – than is altogether healthy for his argument. Similarly, though he seems to concede in places that the child-view thus described enjoys, at best, *relative* autonomy, since it is "both linked to and different from the dominant adult model" (p.51), he is nevertheless tempted to conclude that children's games "provide more universal evidence for the natural predispositions of the human mind" (p.70). Worse still, Thomas then appeals to the hoary old notion that "the development of the child's mind and body is essentially a biological constant" (p.70). In slaughtering any notion of history as an account of the social limits imposed on individuals, Thomas leaves kiddie-lit with what it wants – the transcendental core of the individual, most present in the pre-social (when exactly?) child.

Much criticism has rested, however implicitly, on such a historical schema. Thus Briggs (on E. Nesbit) claims that it is by ventriloquizing this voice that we liberate.

The mode of address also implies play or simulation, since the text speaks to the child reader not from an adult standpoint but in the voice of a child, and from what is presented as a child's point of view.

(Briggs, 'Women Writers', p.221)

The possibility/actuality of rediscovering such a voice has greatly exercised critics. For this would make the self-absenting author no mere critical manoeuvre, but an actuality; the child would speak from an adult-produced text. Nesbit in particular is often the subject of pseudo-psychological "child within the woman" speculation.

Perhaps it was because E. Nesbit remained emotionally about twelve years old all her life that she found it natural to speak as one intelligent child to another [...].

(Lurie, *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups*, p.102)

Such utterance is "natural", and is thus no trick. It is also the mark of genius in a kiddie-lit text, reducing the adult/child disjunction to zero.

It was when the child in her spoke out directly to other children that she achieved greatness.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Eager, 'Daily Magic', in *Horn Book Reflections: On Children's Books and Reading Selected from Eighteen Years of The Horn Book Magazine - 1949-1966*, ed. by Elinor Whitney Field (Boston: The Horn Book, 1969), pp.211-217 (p.213) (first publ. in *The Horn Book*, October 1958).

Thus, Nesbit makes another breakthrough on which subsequent achievements rest. Conversely, to absolve himself of adult imposition, the critic must also refer back to his own childhood. For even if such child-minded texts have been produced by adults, nothing is achieved if they are to be read by *adult* adults.

I don't perceive much difference in my way of reading now from that of my early years: I can remember the flavour of my childhood reading very clearly, and reproduce it fairly exactly.<sup>5</sup>

One can thus straddle the adult and child worlds, retaining each in its entirety, without compromising either. One's child within can be hailed and consulted at will.

Though I am fifty-one,[...], there is still alive inside me the state of being I experienced as a sixteen-year-old adolescent.<sup>6</sup>

One's memory of one's childish self, mirrored in the response of a child reader, effects a *mise en abyme* of trans-historical recognitions; the means whereby the truly childish nature of a text may be ratified for all time.

The last poem in Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses* addresses the reading parent through the child they once were, and his or her reincarnation in the listening child: the poet recalls the continuity and evanescence of childhood,

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<sup>5</sup> Neil Philip, 'This Way Confusion?', *Signal*, 43 (1984), 12-18 (p.14).

<sup>6</sup> Aidan Chambers, 'All of a Tremble to See His Danger', *Signal*, 51 (1986), 193-212 (p.199).



leaving us with the sense of a garden full of vital ghosts. This continuity is reaffirmed every time an adult reads to a child a once-loved book.<sup>7</sup>

This notion of continuity will reappear at various points throughout my argument, and will be dealt with more fully in my final chapter. For the moment it is enough to note that it is here used to justify the writer's access to the child voice.

The argument may even be inverted, making kiddie-lit the means whereby the child within is preserved, a tonic for jaded adults. Encrusted by the grime of years of social intercourse, we can become as little children once more, at least for the duration of the text.

Indeed, one of the values that distinguishes the best of literature written on behalf of childhood and youth is that it helps maintain and refresh those states within us.

(Chambers, 'All of a Tremble', p.199)

The child is thus persistently seen as an origin, a point of departure, never as the destination of certain social formations, notably children's literature itself. The belief that such a procedure of retrospection – even assuming it can be achieved – yields some originary truth is startling. The old and, one would have assumed, discredited commonplace that the child's journey to adulthood recapitulates in its essentials the history of mankind "from its infancy" seems to inform this sort of thinking, as does the biological/developmental model. In a sense Keith Thomas is wasting

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<sup>7</sup> Candia McWilliam, 'Along Classic Lines', *Independent on Sunday Review*, 12 April 1992, p.34.

his time proposing historical research, and indeed, he genially admits to doubting that "children's lore [...] can be said to have any history at all" (p.70). For it seems that most critics are already confident that a jaunt back into their own childhoods will render the historical truth of *childhood*. This truth, transcendental and immanent, is what is left when history stops, or has not yet started. Such a contention might just be sustained if new-born babes were at issue, but surely founders when we come to the eight-to-twelve-year-old, or even teen, readerships of the books in question. Such a readership has already encountered a variety of different forms of a variety of different institutions; church, family, state etc. Granted, the words "tabula" and "rasa" are not mentioned these days, and the sickly, Fauntleroy-esque, ickle-dickle innocence of the child is definitely *out*. Yet the assumption of a period of minimum influence/prejudice is still strong. From this period, remembered judgements may confidently be drawn as truths concerning "childhood". Whatever the logical inconsistencies of the argument, the child-centred imperative for some such assertion is nevertheless clear; the child's wishes must be consulted, and given full rein. This applies not only to content, but to the very form of language, the voice, used. This, indeed, is what Rousseau suggests.

It has long been a subject of inquiry whether there ever was a natural language common to all; no doubt there is, and it is the language of children before they begin to speak. The language is inarticulate, but it has tone, stress, and meaning. The use of our own language has led us to neglect it so far as to forget it altogether. Let us study children and we shall soon learn it afresh from them.

(*Émile*, p.32)

From some such consultation, though not necessarily as extreme and impracticable as that of Rousseau, the adult author must internalise "the child", or, more precisely, his *voice*. It will be noticed that, for Rousseau as for Aidan Chambers, this operation is as much for the good of the adult as of the child.

The ethnographic trajectory of such a project is clear, whether in the classroom, family, or any of the child's other natural habitats.<sup>7</sup> The skilled investigator will construct for his subjects a field of minimum prejudice in which the natural will become evident, undistorted by social (i.e. bureaucratic, relating to adult institutions) constraints. Some such practice is followed by Piaget, Winnicott et al., regardless of their different aims and beliefs. Thus, as Carolyn Steedman has pointed out

within anthropological studies of child language there is an understandable impulse to seek the least influenced and mediated speech – the story told on the street corner, the verbal play overheard by the non-judgemental, almost absent adult.<sup>8</sup>

A note to the above further suggests that "to be non-judgemental is the modern expression of the nineteenth century spirit of naturalistic observation" (Steedman, p.232, n.27). The writer for children must, if he is to follow such a regime, absent himself not only from his text, but from his very researches.

Within the literary institution, however, such a plan is surely particularly problematic. For between the investigator and the subject lies

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<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *The Tidy House: Little Girls Writing* (London: Virago, 1982), p.91.

an all too visible social construct – literature. All communication in this field is necessarily channelled through the printed word. To speak of literary experience previous to reading is, of course, something of a paradox. For we are dealing with what is remembered by the critic and verified by the observed approval (and, even then, how measured?) of the child reader. How does one escape from this double bind, to argue for literature as a field of minimum prejudice? To understand this, I am afraid, one has to master a whole new concept of literature.

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Hitherto, I have left it to be assumed that kiddie-lit is looking for a way into the literary canon. Yet its proponents exhibit a marked ambivalence towards the literary/academic institution. Thus critics may, at one and the same time, crave admission to, and exemption from it. This will take some explaining.

In the first instance, there is a deep sense of unfair exclusion; criticism is characteristically defensive, championing its beleaguered cause with doughty perseverance. At bottom, there is a basic anxiety that any attachment to child literary culture will bring in tow the charge of infantilisation.

Collectors of children's books, alas, may well be on the defensive in face of their fellow book-collectors to say nothing of the uncomprehending world outside.<sup>9</sup>

How far, then, does this sense of ostracization obtain with regard to the position of the literature itself? John Rowe Townsend is probably right in claiming that "the status of the children's writer remains low" (*Written for Children*, p.174), so there is a strong common-sense reason for redressing the balance, bringing to light previously ignored writers/texts. A critical survey of "forgotten" authors such as Molesworth, Burnett and Ewing will almost inevitably proceed from this position.

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<sup>9</sup> Brian Alderson, 'Collecting Children's Books', in *Children and their Books*, pp.7-17 (p.9).

It is surprising that so few people have written about these ladies, either in criticism or reminiscence.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, however, there has often been a supplementary feeling that academic disregard for kiddie-lit is itself a part or symptom of adult oppression of the child; of the didactic. Thus, the position of kiddie-lit can become the province of a human rights organisation.

Why is children's fiction so often dismissed as second-rate? [...] Is reading still an important part of growing up?<sup>11</sup>

Some such sense of oppression is often expressed by critics. Alison Lurie believes that if juvenile literature "was not still largely in quarantine, [William Mayne] would also be widely read by adults".<sup>12</sup> John Rowe Townsend also rails against what he presents as an unjust and unmerited segregation of audiences.

Children are part of mankind and children's books are part of literature, and any line which is drawn to confine children or their books to their own special corner is an artificial one.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Marghanita Laski, *Mrs. Ewing Mrs. Molesworth and Mrs. Hodgson Burnett* (London: Arthur Barker, 1950), p.7.

<sup>11</sup> "Writing for children" symposium held by PEN: *Mayfest 1992* programme (Glasgow, 1992), p.38

<sup>12</sup> Alison Lurie, 'William Mayne', in *Children and their Books*, pp.369-379 (p.370).

<sup>13</sup> John Rowe Townsend, *A Sense of Story: Essays on Contemporary Writers for Children* (Harlow: Longman, 1971), p.9.

Even Salman Rushdie has made similar comments, interestingly at the time of his induction into kiddie-lit with the publication of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

The world of books has become a severely categorised and demarcated affair, in which children's fiction is not only a kind of ghetto but one subdivided into writing for a number of different age groups.<sup>14</sup>

There is, in short, a recurrent metaphor of incarceration – quarantine, ghetto, confinement – in many recent pleas on behalf of kiddie-lit. The sense of an injustice perpetrated *from without* is palpable. The paranoid visitation of an unreasonably divisive world is drafted in to avoid considering that the very stuff of the texts in question might just be a part of the machinery of segregation; that the representations of the child-world therein might be the very repository for the ideological belief in the need for private realms defined by age-group.

In the above, I have expanded a position consonant with that described in the preceding chapter. Where, then, does the ambivalence to which I have referred lie? There is, in effect, a counter-attitude towards the literary institution held by the self-same critics. For, if this incarceration keeps kiddie-lit unreasonably segregated from adult literature, the desire for desegregation is not whole-hearted. Indeed, segregation may be seen as partly beneficial. For John Rowe Townsend, the institutional market has been a mixed blessing in that, although it has “hardened the dividing line between children's books and adult books

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<sup>14</sup> Salman Rushdie, 'Where the Art Is', *The Independent on Sunday Review*, 3 May 1992, p.27.

into a barrier, behind which separate development now takes place" (*Sense of Story*, p.10), kiddie-lit may just have got the best of this deal.

Could it be, ironically, that precisely because the adult novel is so weak in this country, some talents have been drawn into the children's field and flourished [...].<sup>15</sup>

Kiddie-lit, Townsend has also suggested, comes from the residue left when adults deserted their original, less pretentious, forms of story.

But once the novel, which broadly speaking was sophisticated fiction for adults, began to replace the tale, which was unsophisticated fiction for everybody, there was a logical gap for the children's book to enter.

(*Written for Children*, p.13)

Adult culture's maturation is apparently to be regretted, but one does not complain too much, for in so doing, it has left all that is ancient and originary to the child. The result is that kiddie-lit

has wild blood in it; its ancestry lies partly in the long ages of storytelling which preceded the novel. Myth, legend, fairy-tale are alive in their own right, endlessly reprinted, endlessly fertile in their influence.

(*Sense of Story*, p.12)

For some, kiddie-lit is the last bastion of true, *oral* story-telling values, those that once supposedly linked all classes and ages in

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<sup>15</sup> Brian Jackson, *The Use of English*, (Spring 1970) Advisory Centre for Education, qu. in Townsend, *Sense of Story*, p.11.



community. Literary history is seen as a gradual incrustation of technique and artifice onto a basic, authentic and pure deep structure that can be recovered by genealogical/archaeological backtracking. To those for whom the artificialisation of the ethic of novel-writing (by which I mean the self-conscious absorption of technique resulting in the synthesis of a "modern" ethic of formal sophistication and experimentation) is anathema, fairy-tale and its (alleged) derivatives seem to offer another path, one that preserves organicism and directness of form. To this end, kiddie-lit's development is seen as counter, rather than parallel and concurrent with the novel.

Kiddie-lit thus tends to be seen as at once worthy of the highest literary praise, and quite outwith the normal run of literature. This curious liminal position may even put it beyond the reach of the established literary apparatus. For, we are told, so wild, diverse and other is kiddie-lit, that academia cannot quite cope with it.

'Children's books' is a very curious classification, a chaotic collection of texts that have in common nothing more than some undefined relationship to children. It is hardly surprising that critical tools and critical assumptions designed for a much more homogenous and well-ordered class of texts – 'literature' – do not really fit.

(Hunt, 'Questions of Method', p.199)

Yet elsewhere, where Hunt wants to justify his own critical methods, a relationship between child and text is suddenly quite definable, and indeed recoverable by the adult critic. How, he asks, do we read a child-text?

The best approximation would seem to be based on the reader's self-image as a child, or a memory of the 'feel' of reading.

(Hunt, 'Questions of Method', p.187)

In effect, we are back to the auto-induced simulation of the child voice. Hunt's argument(s) are not, for all that, inconsistent. For the necessity of recovering the child voice, its inscrutable irreducibility, and the insufficiency of existing critical procedure are merely different ways of removing kiddie-lit from the sphere of academic influence, so as to gain a monopoly on the right to critical assessment. Consultation with children, or one's child within, and the subsequent pretension to read in a child-approved fashion, are made necessary prerequisites of any critique. So, according to Margaret Meek, in *The Case of Peter Pan*, Jacqueline Rose's argument, though ingenious,

is weakened because there is no real evidence, in the sense that I recognize it, of children's interactions with the words on the page.<sup>16</sup>

This scruple is of profound inconsequence to Rose's argument, which is rather concerned with the adult stake in writing for children, and questions the very possibility of reading like a child. I would suggest that it is introduced here as a means of disqualifying Rose without even engaging with her arguments. The moral is that no amount of academic sophistication will compensate for a lack of child-sympathy. Meek goes even further than this. According to her, a really substantial criticism will *have* to come first from dedicated lay-preachers.

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<sup>16</sup> Margaret Meek, 'Symbolic Outlining: The Academic Study of Children's Literature' *Signal*, 53 (1987), 97-113 (p.112).

If children's books and writing for children are also to be studied in a place of tertiary education, or to become the matter for academic research, it will be the result of the work of others outside the formal institutions [...].

(Meek, 'Symbolic Outlining', p.98)

This stipulation has the great advantage of excluding Rose and including Meek herself at the same stroke. This done, Meek feels free to remark that "Lacan's idea of the mirror phase" helps to explain the process known as "finding oneself in a book" ('Symbolic Outlining', p.106). Proffering what is, frankly, an idiot-guide conception of Lacan, Meek remarkably fails to mention Rose's own use of his theories.

The general strategy here is to liquidate other academics – principally Rose whose work stands all but alone in questioning the possibility of access to a child-voice – so permitting oneself to seize their intellectual goods and use them to one's own ends. So, according to Peter Hunt, while adult critics are stridently blustering about theory, "children's book critics are quietly adopting the best of this thinking" (Hunt, 'Childist Criticism', p.54). One wonders what is meant by "quietly" given Hunt's own running battle with Rose.

According to Hunt, Rose is guilty of the "scorn from academics" with which the serious study of kiddie-lit has apparently been met (Hunt, *Children's Literature*, p.7). To illustrate this unreasonable scorn, Rose is quoted, apparently accusing "academics and non-academics alike", of

'the ultimate fantasy, perhaps, of children's book criticism that it should come of age and do what the adults (that is adult critics) have been doing all along.'

(Rose, *qu. in Children's Literature*, p.7)

What Hunt curiously, indeed quietly, omits to mention is that the above-quoted barb is, *in situ*, preceded by a direct criticism of his *own* article 'The Mayne Game: An Experiment in Response'.

Although I agree with many of the points made in this article, I would none the less want to distinguish myself from Hunt's overall project which seems to be [...] to establish the literary 'value' and credentials of children's writers and children's book criticism [...].<sup>17</sup>

Far from scornful, Rose's tone appears, to this critic, measured and even polite. Furthermore, the point made does not quite add up to the accusation of puerility detected by Hunt; this is no cheap stab at guilt by association (with the infantile) but a serious questioning of the founding of judgements of literary value on behalf a third party unavailable for interrogation – the child. In short, Rose's critique threatens to destabilize the very foundations of the rising institution of kiddie-lit. For that institution, such as it is, needs a conception of its chosen canon as at once worthy of the most serious literary consideration, *and* beyond the grasp of the existing literary institution. Consequently, it needs an idea of an authentic child-voice that is at once quite other than the adult voice, and yet recoverable by certified adults, and which is, furthermore, at once primary, *and* sophisticated. These ideas will need further explanation.

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<sup>17</sup> J. Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan: or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.154 n.3.

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The precise date at which adult literature loses its way remains unclear, but the argument is conducted on the same terms regardless. At a later date than that suggested by Townsend, when Modernism is beginning to make itself felt, and children's literature has just produced the main archetypes for its expansion in the remaining half of the century, John Buchan unleashes a polemic that places fairy tales against the modern novel. The former belong to the

common stock of humanity and are closer to mankind than any written word.<sup>18</sup>

His argument is that "only in so far as the novel is a development of and akin to the folk and fairy tale does it fully succeed" (p.7). Buchan approves of those "whose one aim was to say clearly what they had to say and to have done with it – a creed which would be regarded, I fear, as a sort of black-legging by most men of letters" (p.3). This is a simplicity that arises from an organic attachment to one's world.

Mr Hardy is always very near the soil and the traditions of the soil [...].

(p.9)

What is striking about this is that, though Buchan does not explicitly mention "children's literature", the literary values he is promoting are very similar to those subsequently espoused by kiddie-lit operatives. The literature demanded by Buchan in 1931 has appeared

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<sup>18</sup> John Buchan, *The Novel and the Fairy Tale*, English Association Pamphlet, no. 79 July 1931, (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p.16.

since, but in the form of kiddie-lit, a "movement" whose proponents have often reproduced the terms of Buchan's polemic. These terms may be identified as the *oral*, the *simple*, and the *organic*, and it is to these terms, and their current usage in describing the child voice, that we must turn. The organic will require a chapter of its own; I will begin with the simple.

The *simple style* is a form of address designated as the exemplar of plain-talking, a style that proclaims its own truthfulness.<sup>19</sup> The true children's book, we are told, is on the level because the adult has put himself in the place of the child and spoken his truth. This is not condescension because the child's is a superior truth in any case, one that may be beyond dull adults habituated to the safe world of grown-up literature. This concatenation of dubious axioms, which arose in my discussion of voice congregates around the idea of the simple style. It is thus worthwhile quoting at some length a fairly comprehensive exposition of this idea taken from a review by Candia McWilliam of Alison Lurie's *Don't Tell the Grown Ups* (1990).

The urbane and reserved style – no side-orders of nutty theories, no cherries on the metaphors – is in keeping with the subject of children and what they read, a tone often possessed by those who are genuinely good with children, bespeaking fairness of mind, unembarrassed intimacy and the exact apprehension of what children are [...].<sup>19</sup>

The thing by which the intimacy described is "unembarrassed" is the encumbrance of adult linguistic over-sophistication which, once

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<sup>19</sup> Candia McWilliam, 'Trust Hansel and Gretel More Than Janet and John', *Independent on Sunday Review*, 27 May 1990, p.17.

divested, leaves one with what is felt to be a rather more decent posture. It is the excess of grown-up trope – "cherries on the metaphors", itself a fairly ghastly trope – that is felt to be an addition, a pose. The style in which one addresses the child is a non-style, what you get when you eschew style. This seems justified since it is a style that reflects "what children are", our first selves before we became encrusted with the mendacity and double-talk of the world. In this spirit, McWilliam embraces the values of childhood to the extent of accusing Dorothy Parker of being a "show-off" for her jibe at Pooh, "tonstant weader fwowed up" (p.17). Thus, McWilliam borrows not only the language but also the values of the playground.

What is striking here is that the claims made for the simple style are not merely functional or pragmatic. For the argument is suffused, on occasion almost overpowered, by a tangle of moral assertions. Excessive (how measured?) metaphor is somehow indecent, or vulgar. This simple style on the other hand is the token, indeed the very stuff, of honesty, innocence and so on. Furthermore, it is apparently incumbent upon us to adopt this style whenever children are *at stake*, even though they are not *in the room*. For McWilliam suggests that this style is appropriate not only to the writing of books *for* children, but to works of criticism concerned with kiddie-lit also, which surely cannot expect a large child readership. Unsurprisingly, Lurie herself can be found promoting this minimalist notion of language; William Mayne's characters, we are told, speak truly because they are innocents.

Such protagonists or narrators see nature and human relations uncontaminated by received ideas, and speak a language that is both simple and original.

(Lurie, 'William Mayne', p.371)

The more reports of this miraculous language one reads, the more elusive its formal characteristics become, as they disappear into a dense undergrowth of laudatory rhetoric extolling its moral qualities. It is this moral dimension that I wish to pursue first, in the hope of discovering its material manifestations in criticism.

Apparently a direct correlation can be made between justice and grammar. Over-sophistication in the latter gives us (adults) the power to circumvent the former – that is, to lie.

Huck names as lies or cruelty or beastliness all the behaviour which is so, quite without fogging the judgements in adult clouds of subjunctives.

(Inglis, p.51)

According to Fred Inglis, it is Huck's very lack of sophistication, his ignorance of the subjunctive – the mood of qualification and circumscription – that constrains him to speak directly. One could take this further. For Huck's role will be to "name" things: that is to say, he will deal in *nouns* and their proper application. Verbs will only serve to send these names to their proper destination. For if they are given any more sophisticated jobs, they will start humming and hawing in that slippery subjunctive mood. Huck knows none of this, so he is qualified to become the child critic of adult folly. Inglis pursues the idea beyond this, with a curious sort of rigour, laying bare in the process some of the assumptions on which the idea of the simple language rests.



Bunyan's simplicity of seeing is perfectly unselfish; the words seem to withdraw, and become transparent, so that we see with Bunyan's eyes, and Bunyan matters, not for himself, but because his writing makes the scene visible with a proper dread.

(Inglis, pp.10-11)

The simple style is language's absolute zero, where it modestly effaces its own impulse for self-elaboration, and simply gets on with the job -- telling the truth. There is a sharply moralised distinction here (as in McWilliam above) between the basic tools of communication, and language for language's sake. Words ought to do their job and exit quietly, not flirt and show off their finery; none of this subordinate clause, sequence of tense nonsense. The author is thus at his best when most self-effacing; modesty is at a premium. For "Bunyan matters, not for himself", and his writing is truthful precisely because he has seen this and "unselfishly" abdicated.

Having, thus, reduced to a minimum words' deceptive glamour, direct transmission of value is possible. The simple style is a sort of diplomatic bag through the war zone of misreading and indeterminacy, for, as Inglis says of Dickens (of all people), "there is a precise fit between prose and subject-matter" (p.35). Thus shaven of excess and spared the vicissitudes of normal adult intercourse, such a language may lead us into righteousness.

The way in which William Mayne writes is as incompatible with lying and cowardice as John Bunyan's way. Mayne's simplicity and modesty *embody* -- and because they embody, they *are* -- a way of living well.

(Inglis, p.15)

Here, then, is a voice that speaks truly, and may be trusted to speak truly. According to such a linguistic model, the child becomes the locus of purity in language and the mirror/gauge of our own return to that state. The author is apparently seeking, not only to influence the child, but also to gain his approval, so to be absolved of adult over-sophistication.

That McWilliam at least intends her approval of kiddie-style to serve as a lesson for adults is clear in her other writing on kiddie-lit. Picture books, we are told, "can depart as far as the text demands from realism, without losing the attention – that is the faith – of the readers".

Only the very best books survive the test of continuing to charm or surprise the parent reading them aloud several hundred times a year for four years or more. This is a foolproof method of weeding out bad faith, cuteness and artifice [...]. It's a pity there's not the time – or the audience – to do it for grown-up books as well.<sup>20</sup>

This area of thought is, indeed, curiously, marked by notions of moral debt and obligation; the child (-text, -voice, -discourse) sets a challenge to the adult, demands a certain rigour. Thus, a rich and irreducible text may call for plain-talking from the adult critic. For Neil Philip, theory withers in the face of a book as rich as *The Water Babies*.

The only thing the critic need do is discard all theories and read the words on the page, attentively, sympathetically, honestly. The rest will follow.

(Philip, 'This Way Confusion?', p.12)

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<sup>20</sup> Candia McWilliam, 'Drawn to Pass the Time-after-time Test', *Independent on Sunday Review*, 8 December 1991, p.43.

The obligation to speak plainly in writing for children is equally applicable to reading, and writing about, that writing. This is apparently demanded by the texts themselves.

They need critics who are willing to approach them naked, *not* decked out in the latest intellectual finery [...]. How can one say anything interesting or illuminating about a book one has not read *as it was supposed to be read* : that is, in the open, unhurried expectation of pleasure?

(Philip, 'This Way Confusion?', p.13)

One must, of course, resort to ratiocination at some stage in the writing of criticism, but, in the process of reading at least, the kiddie-lit text suffers little adults to come to it as (over-grown) children. The position arrived at is one that curiously contradicts its liberatory beginnings, a point rather self-consciously and lamely disavowed by Philip.

The reader must be, not passive, but submissive, to the author's intention.

(Philip, 'This Way Confusion', p.14)

So fine is the hair thus split that one's attention is merely drawn all the more forcibly to the anxiety it attempts to assuage; mightn't it be true that the simple style, in disdaining reflection/theory, counsels passivity/submission? For Neil Philip, the situation is saved by a proper, dutiful mirroring of the book's narrative argument onto the critic; that is to say, by identification. Thus, in Leon Garfield's *Jack Holborn*

there is a sense in which the narrator, Jack, *does not know*, until he discovers it in the course of his adventures, that Lord Sheringham is Captain Rogers's twin.

(Philip, 'This Way Confusion?', p.16)

This is a quaint way of saying that the reader *becomes* Jack. It is "this sharing in the narrator's discoveries" (Philip, p.16) that keeps us on the right track. The argument seems to be that the text itself is as much in the dark at any given point as ourselves, the readers; thence comes a sort of equality, precluding the possibility that the text might be directing us. Whatever the case may be, Philip is responding to the horrible idea that simplicity might lead not to freedom but to enslavement.

For once one has scrupulously composed one's text in this simple language (assuming, for the moment that such a thing is possible), might it not be protested that, having made the meaning of a text transparent for the reader, one has simultaneously restricted its interpretative scope? If one merely calls a table a table, where can the collaborative imagination of the reader make its *entrée*? The looming crisis of this theory, where it is noticed at all, tends to be headed off by the creation of the twins, good and bad simplicity. At times, however, these appear to be identical twins, so minutely distinguished are they. Thus Aidan Chambers criticises Roald Dahl for his chummy betrayal of childhood.

What he aims to achieve – and does – is a tone of voice which is clear, uncluttered, unobtrusive, not very demanding linguistically, and which sets up a sense of intimate, yet adult-controlled, relationship between his second self and his implied child reader. [...] It is, in fact, the tone of a friendly adult storyteller who knows how to entertain children while at the same time keeping them in their place.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Aidan Chambers, 'The Reader in the Book', in *Children's Literature*, pp.91-114 (p.96) (first publ. in *Booktalk: Occasional Writing on Literature and Children* (London: Bodley Head, 1985), pp.34-58).

We are assured, however, that "style [...] can work in a much more complex and subtly effective way", something we will see "when we come to examine a major text" (Chambers, p.97). Yet, when the major text, Lucy M. Boston's *The Children of Green Knowe*, arrives, one is hard-pressed to figure out what differentiates its style from that of Dahl.

At the very least the style appeals to the child-in-the-adult, possessing that very tone of voice I earlier suggested is traditionally the English tone used in telling stories to children: direct, clear, polite, firm, uncluttered. And Mrs Boston achieves it admirably.

(Chambers, p.108)

One text is "clear, uncluttered, unobtrusive", the other, "direct, clear, polite, firm, uncluttered", yet the values attributed to the former are quite opposed to those of the latter; it is never made quite clear why Dahl is "not very demanding linguistically" while Boston performs her authorly duty "admirably". Chambers's judgements may conceivably reflect some truth, but his terminology is opaque and contradictory; it cannot make the distinctions it wants to make.

The distinction, in effect, lies quite outside the description of style which is at stake, and consists of a moral quality whose formal characteristics remain perpetually unclear. What emerges from Chamber's argument is not so much a description of good and bad simplicity in the "style" of writing for children, as the apparent necessity of maintaining the existence of some such opposition. For the simple style is, alarmingly, capable of producing both the chummy, coddling betrayal of childhood, and readerly freedom.

So, faced with this loophole in its theory, kiddie-lit-crit, rather than suspect that the terms in use, and the values ascribed to them may be radically faulty, seeks to refine further on the existing theory. Peter Hunt may be found, as usual, in the process of fine-tuning. On the one hand there is the Enid Blyton tendency.

Surface language takes over and controls thought. Hence restricted language, if it leads to cliché and register-formation, too often, and possibly inevitably, leads to the expression of simple and simplistic ideas.

(Hunt, *Criticism*, p.106)

The argument seems to be heading towards a rejection of the notion of some admirable simplicity, and indeed, elsewhere Hunt has levelled similar criticism at the "bad" simple style. Indeed, this is the precise reason given for Hunt's condemnation of Michelle Magorian's *Goodnight Mr Tom*, already cited in the preceding chapter. Hunt convincingly – if somewhat pedantically – shows Magorian's overuse of a repetitive and unadorned pronoun-verb-object sentence structure. Hence, bad simplicity means bad teaching.

Magorian's text tells rather than shows, explicates rather than demonstrates; and books which retain this dominating narrational presence, the residual or 'transferred' storyteller, are a textual echo of storytelling as an event which the storyteller essentially controls.

(*Criticism*, p.85)

Yet, this is only the bad twin; its good sibling is never far away.

Whereas the sub-oral approach *can* find strength in simplicity, here [in Blyton] there is little more than 'negative' predictability. The patterns of language do not allow for any ambiguities within the author-reader contract.

(*Criticism*, p.107)

Hunt manages not to make quite such a dramatic volte-face as Chambers; the nature of good simplicity remains in parentheses, something hurried on and off the scene with a blithe "whereas", and a negatively implied capability of producing "ambiguities in the author-reader contract". Nevertheless, Hunt has provided us, however elliptically, with the name of the approved form of simplicity – "sub-oral" – and the quality that is simplicity's necessary adjunct and complement – "ambiguity". The conjunction of the two is by no means casual. When Hunt has finished with Magorian, he turns to another text – Janni Howker's *Isaac Campion* – that he deems more worthwhile.

If we start with 'mechanical' skill, then we might say that the text is relatively easy, because it is 'oral'.

(*Criticism*, p.95)

Yet, in the course of his word-by-word analysis, he discovers numerous points where the young reader might interpret in a "personal" way. Thus he arrives at his conclusion.

The more complex the layers of meaning (and we commonly praise such complexity in a book), the more difficult it will be for the reader to make a meaning close to either what the writer meant, or what the majority of us make of it. And it has nothing to do with how difficult the book is mechanically.

(*Criticism*, p.96)

Hunt's argument shows some signs of strain. He feels bound to praise plurality of meanings – which “we commonly praise” – but one is equally bound to ask who, then, is this “majority of us”, to which “the reader” does not belong, but which nevertheless must be composed of “readers”. In effect, the text is imagined to be basically simple, but comes with a supply of spaces into which readers can fit their own personality. Thus the text may plausibly be thought of as at once simple and complex – at once childish and adult. Thus, simplicity, good simplicity, may act as a vessel for serious thought. For, the art of kiddie-lit lies in

making a fully serious adult statement, as a good novel of any kind does, and making it utterly simple and transparent [...]. The need for comprehensibility imposes an emotional obliqueness, an indirection of approach, which like elision and partial statement in poetry is often a source of aesthetic power.

(*Criticism*, p.45)

The above is quoted by Peter Hunt from Jill Paton Walsh, a practitioner commenting on her art. Here, the sequence is reversed; the simple style does not reduce intellectual substance, as in Blyton, but rather forces the writer to develop expertise in a sort of artistic economy. With thrift – and Walsh is praised by Hunt on the same page as “level-headed” – one may purchase the most sophisticated of meanings with the humblest of words. Good kiddie-lit, we would then have to assume, possesses an inviolable richness of meaning which predates its articulation, and survives its journey to the reader intact, or indeed improved and concentrated, by its encounter with language. The act of making a full adult statement into a work of art for children may impose obliqueness and elision, but this may turn out to be a strength. There are



here notions of seriousness, complexity and ambiguity common in recent criticism that will require some exploration.

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Firstly, let it be noted that it would simply not do to have a literature that did not have "ambiguity". This is all the more true where one is dealing with children, and the threat of adult control looms.

Above all, we need to see children 'performing' meaning under the influence of the texts and learning to *traffic in possibilities*.

(Meek, 'Symbolic Outlining', p.113)

Thus, when we find Fred Inglis nominating literature as the ideal religion-substitute, he is pitching the ambiguo-iferous qualities of the former against the authoritarianism of the latter.

[Literature's] liturgy elevates doubts, qualifications, ambiguities, a fertility of multiple meanings, as its host.

(Inglis, p.44)

For ambiguity is the sign of seriousness, and seriousness is the sign of great literature. Thus William Mayne, earlier praised by Inglis for his simplicity, is also praised, this time by Alison Lurie, for his ambiguities. *A Game of Dark* is exemplary because

like all Mayne's best work, and most serious fiction, adult or 'juvenile', [it] does not end neatly. Instead it opens out possibility and meaning.

(Lurie, 'William Mayne', p.379)

One finds Peter Hunt praising some quality of adulthood/seriousness in similar terms. For him, there is a

distinguishable species of novel

that might for convenience be called the 'adult', or mature, mode. In such books, endings are ambiguous; we see part of the texture of life.

(Hunt, *Criticism*, p.129)

"Ambiguity" serves thus as a register of seriousness *per se*, uneasily identified as adult. Yet it is not so diffuse as to permeate the whole weft of the text indiscriminately. For this quality of ambiguity is frequently understood, as both Hunt and Lurie suggest, to be a matter particularly of *endings*. Firstly, let me note that, given Hunt's concern to stress the state of the art, "theorised" character of his approach, here is a topographical placing of the site of meaning whose precision is a marvel to behold. The plurality of readings, on this account, would appear to be something that arrives out of the summation of the text's parts, calculated in retrospect, rather than a page by page occurrence. Rather than await the ending, as naive humanist readers once did, to find out what happens, one awaits the ending to find out what alternatives one has. The much-vaunted readerly involvement thus invoked risks being little more than a text-directed game of hunt the sixpence cunningly hidden in the pudding, a notion distinctly *not* correlate to Derrida's *aporia* or Macherey's 'silence'. It is precisely this reductive tendency that is criticised by Derrida as the downfall of structuralism.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, it is surprising to find Hunt using such a notion, for ~~there~~ is a much more convenient idea of plurality of meanings to hand – that of

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<sup>22</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Force and Signification', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp.3-30.

the "gap". Here one stresses the importance of what is not said, over what is said. Thus, that most useful of kiddie-texts, the book that can be read time and time again, has this quality precisely because a little language goes a long way.

Parents who read the same book regularly to their children know that only the 'good' ones stand up to repetition. Exactly why? The answer must lie surely in the relationship of the language to the meaning.

(Margaret Meek 'What Counts as Evidence?', p.178)

What Meek seems to mean here, though this is not absolutely clear, is that there is an optimal word/meaning ratio that allows fresh discovery in the apparently unelaborate. In this way, critics may argue that simplicity – in the following example Jane Gardam's "crystalline language" – far from compromising readerly freedom, produces spaces in which it can operate.

Nothing is stated that is not exact and necessary, and what is left out gives resonance and tension to her writing; this is one reason why her best books are so rereadable.<sup>23</sup>

Implicitly, some texts facilitate this more than others. Indeed, Margaret Meek has devoted a whole pamphlet, the aptly named *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn*, to choice and pedagogical use of such texts. As if fearing the curse of the didactic, Meek is, from the outset, anxious to reassure us that the word "teach" is to be used in the non-

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<sup>23</sup> Kit Pearson, 'Jane Gardam', in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, ed. by Tracy Chevalier, 3rd edn (Chicago and London: St James Press, 1989), pp.373-4 (p.373).

school, bean-bag sense.

This booklet is a workshop rather than an essay or a lecture.

(Meek, *How Texts Teach*, p.3)

In this relaxed atmosphere, we meet such writer/artists as John Burningham who, by obligingly leave "gaps in the text" (p.16), "shows how texts teach how they are to be read" (p.18). Where a parent/teacher is taking a child through a picture-book, the leaving of gaps is to be further mediated.

Don't explain everything; leave some of the artist-author's secrets for another time.

(p.19)

If Meek's programme is shamelessly saturated with ideas of control and intention, this does not prevent her from drafting in a spurious post-structuralism. When all these gaps have done their work, the result, according to Meek, will be the Barthesian *scriptible*.

Readers sometimes *feel* they are really rewriting the story as they read it.

Barthes calls some of this 'writerly' text.

(p.20; emphasis mine)

It is the gappy text that allows the mediator of reading – the teacher or parent – to disappear and "let the texts teach the reader" (p.38) and it is the child's friend, the gappy, paedocentric author, that we have to thank for this contribution to "subversion" of the adult order.

What we have to realize is that the young have powerful allies in a host of gifted artists and writers to help them to subvert the world of their elders.

(p.40)

The gap version of ambiguity has, of course, the great advantage that it is not, notionally, in contradiction with "simplicity". It is all part of the same devolutionary process wherein the author develops the text "so that the story moves from being mine to the reader's".<sup>24</sup> It is thus, perversely, precisely here, where readerly freedom is at a premium, that the (paedocentrically) directive role of the text is most visible in critical accounts.

Other authors leave gaps which the reader must fill before the meaning can be complete. A skilful author wishing to do this is somewhat like a play-leader: he structures his narrative so as to direct it in a dramatic pattern that leads the reader towards possible meaning(s); and he stage-manages the reader's involvement by bringing into play various techniques which he knows influence the reader's responses and expectations [...].

(Chambers, 'The Reader in the Book', p.102)

As Chambers candidly announces, ambiguity/alternative readings are the product of the author's skill, deployed before the book has ever been read. To effect this, the author becomes a "play-leader", and indeed "of the tribe of childhood" (p.98); that is, a teacher who is not quite a teacher, the "tutor" as described in my preceding chapter, as opposed to Wackford Squeers. Yet, these teacherly flourishes (with which we are now familiar) are meant to offer freedom of interpretation, and Chambers is

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<sup>24</sup> Aisling Foster, 'Teen Dreamers', *Independent on Sunday Review*, 24 May 1992, p.24.

careful not to give the impression of readerly passivity. He posits two sorts (cf. similar Manichaean approach to 'simplicity') of 'gap'. There are those resulting from unconscious assumptions, and those which "challenge the reader to participate in making meaning" (p.103). The latter are the good ones.

Of course it doesn't all depend on the author [...]. Unless a reader accepts the challenge, no relationship that seeks to discover meaning is possible.

(Chambers, p.102)

It is this author/reader compact that appeals to Chambers. There is little sign, even in the "theorised" critics, of sustained interest in plural readings that are *not* the product of conscious authorial technique. The gaps resulting from unconscious assumptions are passed over as merely bad, for according to Chambers they are

relatively unimportant until they become so dominant in the text that people who do not – or do not wish to – make the same assumptions feel alienated by them as they read.

(Chambers, p.103)

These texts or features of text, Chambers at least implies, are simply to be avoided as unpleasant. For him, the second, author-intended, form of gap is "far more important" (p.103). What is striking here, apart from the contradictory proposition that it is the "gap" controlled by the author that liberates, is the notion that a text innocent of any ideological assumption is possible. The gap – conveniently unquotable, and thus not available for interrogation – serves to distract attention from the thoroughly material textual indications that surround it.

Alan Garner's *Red Shift* is much-praised for its reliance on untagged dialogue, which, it is suggested, keeps authorial prejudgement to a minimum. The text proceeds

with emphasis on dialogue rather than narrative, with the abrupt tentativeness of ordinary discourse replacing the artificial conventions of literary speeches.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the reader must place himself within the dialogue, attend to it as to a real conversation, rather than languish outside the text, in the atrophied abstraction of mere reading.

The reader is forced to concentrate and participate if he is to share in the experience and to extract meaning.

(Mc Vitty, p.377)

For Peter Hunt also, the result is a "*scriptible*" text, one that demands the reader's participation to fill in the gaps. Thus he quotes, with full approval, Neil Philip.

'What is interesting about this technique is how much it enables Garner to communicate without ever expressing it in words. The whole of Tom and Jan's sexual relationship, for instance, is contained in pauses between sentences. It is quite clear, but it is neither described nor mentioned.'

(Hunt, *Criticism*, p.113)

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<sup>25</sup> Walter McVitty, 'Alan Garner', in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, pp.376-7 (p.377).



As Jacqueline Rose has already pointed out (Rose, p.48), with reference to this very passage, Philip – and thus, by consent, Hunt – praise Garner both for bluntness, clarity of communication, and at the same time, for a refusal to discuss sex. At this point, I would remind the reader of Hunt's assertion, quoted in my first chapter, that sex is, in one of his own fictions, "there by implication", in spite of the fact that he felt incapable of writing a "sex scene". Rather than opening up scope for interpretation, this sort of manoeuvre would seem to me to narrow it. I will give a detailed reading of *Red Shift* in my final chapter; for the moment, however, it must be said that certain things *are* implied very clearly by the text, but, to this reader at least, they seem to pertain more to confessional and hair shirt than to bed. Sexual frustration and misery *are* vividly represented – and in *words* – sexual intercourse not at all; nor will any amount of poring over those mysterious pauses between sentences make it appear. The claim that "the *whole* of Tom and Jan's sexual relationship" (emphasis mine) is expressed through pauses is thus *doubly* wrong. For while the physical side of the whole remains forever out of sight, its psychological impact is there in full colour. The only gap in this text seems to be sexual pleasure. Quite why its non-appearance should be thought of as liberatory is, I confess, beyond me.

Indeed, the liberatory nature of all of these critical descriptions of ambiguity is somewhat dubious. If, as Peter Hunt claims, children are "deconstructors *par excellence*" (*Criticism*, p.98), it is curious to reflect that they are apparently unable to read against the grain of the text, unless so instructed *by the text*. Surely there is a problem in this notion of teaching children ambiguity by touchstone, in that all that is thus learnt are particular textual games, which may or may not lead to a fuller concept of difference in interpretation. At the limit, we come back to the notion,

particularly visible in Meek, of a breed of disestablished, axiomatically disinterested non-teachers offering the *sensation* of freedom, which the critic promptly identifies as freedom pure and simple.

It has not, in truth, taken us many logical steps to reduce yet another piece of benevolent, liberating patronage to yet another authorial gift. Difference in reading is given a homeland, a guest bedroom – is in other words accommodated – and the universality of the text may be reasserted, under the guise of meaning for all. Lip service is paid to diverse determinations of meaning and the reader's freedom (the crucial point for kiddie-lit), and a facade of liberty, can be pasted onto what may well be the same old story.

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As we have already seen, the "oral" style is sometimes thought of as the ideal vehicle for both simplicity and ambiguity. Why this should be so is perhaps not immediately clear, and in any case the oral has an importance which is not quite subsumed by my critique in the preceding section, and will thus require separate consideration. We often hear that good writers for children are those who, like Janet and Alan Ahlberg, "have a special kind of insight into the part the oral tradition plays in the lives of children" (Meek, *How Texts Teach*, p.22). Thus, the oral does not necessarily take leave of its orality when it enters print.

Children can hear a story, if only they will; an oral and a print culture are not so separate in their world.

(Inglis, p.56)

So it becomes a natural duty for the kiddie-lit author to *write* in an *oral* fashion, one that facilitates the hearing of texts. There is a distinction to be made here between a particular form of artifice that seeks to simulate the effect of, say, a folk tale, and one that claims genetic descent from the originals. Philippa Pearce is surely right to stress the particular discipline and technique of adaptation for radio. One must "select and dramatize", and "write directly for speaking". Yet need one accept that "clearly this related itself to the great oral tradition of story-telling for children" (qu. in Townsend, *Sense of Story*, p.169)? I suggest that what is going on here is a subtle piece of dissection that opposes the spoken to the printed, thus extricating kiddie-lit from the apparent evils of print culture, and thus of social influence. As such, it is another bid for purity of expression.

Margaret Mahy has produced an account of her own retrospection into childhood in search of her fictive roots. Once there, she finds two separate strands in her juvenilia. There are stories clearly derived from the books she was reading at the time; these she finds conventional and generic, too clearly born under the influence of print. The other strand are those "oral" tales told to herself.

There was the story of Edric, the Anglo-Saxon boy who made friends with a group of Norman invaders. I have no ideas regarding the origin of this story [...].<sup>26</sup>

It is in these tales, spontaneous and inexplicable, that she finds the origins of her writing for children as an adult. These concerned people

who often existed outside the law, and who somehow managed to compel the world to their pattern rather than submitting to the pattern of the world.

(Mahy, 'Joining the Network', p.156)

The free, the rootless, the obscure of origin thus produced a subversive strain in her writing. Her task as a writer (she tells us) lay in synthesising these elements into print form. Once again, we see children's literature (apparently) escaping social determination, here in the form of print culture. For the oral is, according to Mahy, "the most primary and spontaneous form of language that we have at our disposal" (p.159). Thus kiddie-lit efficiently cuts out the middle man; why buy water bottled when you can return to the fresh pure spring of the child – man in his infancy as a story-teller? Print may be the ultimate destination of a tale, but it is not – we are to believe – its origin.

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Mahy, 'Joining the Network', *Signal*, 54 (1987), 151-169 (p.155).

An ostensibly more credible – indeed, right on – version of this argument has been proposed, in which a return to the oral faces up to the standardisation of language associated with the rise of print culture. Here, the oral is intimately identified with dialect and locale. Aidan Chambers notes the potency and variety of dialect in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.

In my country, similar sensitive work has been done by writers like Alan Garner, William Mayne, Jane Gardam, John Gordon, and Jan Mark, who have all brought demotic forms of English into children's and young adult literature, where in the past such accents and dialects were regarded by the literary establishment as illiterate, comic versions of their own use of the language.

(Chambers, 'All of a Tremble', p.209)

Alan Garner – something of a hard-liner in this area of writing – is again recommended, this time by Margaret Meek (via Neil Philip), as an exemplar of fiction as an excavation of "our" pre-print world.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a reading of Alan Garner's *Stone Book Quartet* becomes a study of what he re-creates from the discovery of his literary and linguistic past. By exhuming what is embedded in the texts, Neil Philip relocates Garner's work in a kind of traditional innocence of utterance associated with the folk tale. He shows Garner rejecting the elitism of Standard English and claiming that the young reader should rediscover literature derived from a local culture.

(Meek, 'Symbolic Outlining', p.104)

There is a strong organicist impulse here, in the emphasis on locale, and an archaeological idea of critique as excavation, both of which I will discuss more fully in following chapters. For the time being, let us

confine ourselves to the matter of dialect. First, let me make it quite clear that I do not reject outright the use of dialect in literature, nor do I offer unequivocal support to the notion of Standard English. There is, conceivably, a point of resistance here. The problem with the exposition of the case as above, however, lies in its conception of pre-print influence as the proper site of literary/linguistic (which are, especially in the work of Meek, inextricably bound) development and the creation of subversive subjects. For the point is one of liberating, by example in text, what, once more, has been there all along.

For the worst slavery of all is slavery to a language that is not your own. In the language of story we define what we are and invent the identity we want for ourselves.

(Chambers, 'All of a Tremble', p.208)

By a curious critical elision, the voice of dialect is seen as belonging to the child simply because it can, like the child, be seen, however spuriously, as originary. Unlike other languages, it has apparently not been agreed, previous to any given subject, as a matter of social convention. Furthermore, it matters little that Alan Garner's Cheshire dialect is as much a foreign language for my (Central Scottish/Glaswegian Latin student etc.) self as is Standard English. It is thus not clear to me in what precise sense I am liberated when I read the following, culled at random from *The Stone Book Quartet*.

"Get your knee aback of your shovel," said Grandfather. "There's no sense in mauling yourself half to death. Come on, youth. Shape!"

Joseph chopped, shovelled and threw. Grandfather worked the stone.

"I don't know why I bother," he said. "I'd as lief let it lie. The rubbish they send!  
I doubt there's not above a hundred years in it. Watch your line!"<sup>27</sup>

What is evident here, apart from the quaint idiom and vocabulary, however accurately and unpatronisingly transcribed, and whether or not one agrees that "Garner's unfailing ear has captured perfectly the idiosyncratic voice of the oral storyteller" (Mc Vitty, p.377), is the studied absence of Latinate, standard, literary diction. For the oral-derived voice of kiddie-lit is the epitome of a simple tongue, one that doesn't mince its words. Rather than rhetorical flourish, it will favour plain truths plainly spoken, whether in the form of the dubious folk wisdom of *The Stone Book Quartet* or in a less markedly demotic vein. It is, indeed, the ideal home of the simple style. Or more precisely, the use of language in Garner's *Stone Book* corresponds most closely to the *critical* notion of a simple style, which is otherwise somewhat elusive. Therefore, while I would still tend to regard the simple style as something of a critical myth, it will be useful to examine some instances where it becomes, more or less, an actuality.

Here another tutor emerges; the peasant. This figure speaks directly from the heart of the text, and his simple, no nonsense diction is its own recommendation. The first words of Garner's *The Stone Book* set the tone for what follows.

A bottle of cold tea; bread and a half onion. That was father's baggin. Mary emptied her apron of stones from the field and wrapped the baggin in a cloth.  
(p.9)

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<sup>27</sup> Alan Garner, *The Stone Book Quartet* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p.59.

Short, clipped, such a voice tacitly asks us; what more could you want to know? Simple things are described in simple words. This voice is not unique to Garner. Jane Gardam's *The Hollow Land* announces itself on the first page, "I'm Bell Teesdale. I'm a lad. I'm eight".<sup>28</sup> Gardam, however, effects a compromise between marked dialect in spoken sections, and a fairly neutral descriptive style. Garner, on the other hand, maintains an even tone throughout the *Quartet*. Of what, then, does this tone or style consist?

The first thing to note is that, for the Garner of the *Stone Book*, less is more. The structure is paratactic, avoiding subordination and even co-ordination, of all sorts. Verbs are not there to bring a colourful predicate in tow, but to render basic actions in a starkly monumental fashion. Hence "Joseph chopped, shovelled and threw" (*Stone Book*, p.59) – intransitively – is all we need to know. The object – rock – is understood, a gap, and nothing else stands in the way of the basic, timeless silhouette of the labourer, a single unadorned image presented by a single unadorned sentence. Conversely, action may be dissolved, by synecdoche, into object. So Joseph rejects the family trade with the rather gnomic "I don't want stone" (*Stone Book*, p.90). Thus, where Garner's language is not merely functional, it has a portentous ring to it, tending towards the aphoristic. Where characters offer advice, it is this voice that lends their utterance an impersonal and timeless authority. Thus Joseph is exhorted, with inescapable justice, to "give over gondering at what can't be helped" (p.86), or to "get prenticed, and a roof over you, and meat in you, and drink" (p.92). Indeed, all the characters of the *Quartet* hold this discourse at some

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<sup>28</sup> Jane Gardam, *The Hollow Land* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1983), p.9.



time or another, and they rarely fail to take each others' advice, for they speak with one voice. Since language – voice, diction – is our concern here, it would seem to me pointless to multiply examples at this stage. For, on this level, *The Stone Book Quartet* strives to remain *on a level*, to become the pure performance of the peasant voice. If one believes this is a liberatory device, then Garner has probably succeeded.

On the other hand, there is still the matter of literary competence. How is one to acquire the necessary grasp of Latinate, periodic writing that characterises English Literature by immersing oneself in folk-culture, however pure? The problem is an acute one for literature, perhaps for kiddie-lit in particular, given its anxiety over the place of education. It would seem difficult to escape Bourdieu's double-bind.

Blindness to what the legitimate culture and the dominated culture owe to the structure of their symbolic relations, i.e. to the structure of the relation of domination between the classes, inspires on the one hand the 'culture for the masses' programme of 'liberating' the dominated classes by giving them the means of appropriating legitimate culture [...] and on the other hand the populist project of decreeing the legitimacy of the cultural arbitrary of the dominated classes as constituted in and by the fact of its dominated position, canonizing it as 'popular culture'.<sup>29</sup>

Bourdieu is anxious to stress the inter-relation of high and low, local and national, cultures, and thus to question the possibility of a mono-culture. As has been seen, the Garner of the *Quartet* sees a populist

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<sup>29</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London & Beverley Hills: Sage, 1977), pp.23-4.

retreat into a purified language as the answer to our prayers. Curiously enough, however, another Garner text, the less-discussed/lauded *The Owl Service*, imagines a much less contradiction-free discursive world. For resistance itself is dramatised, rather than assumed as a *fait accompli* of the text's stylistic practice.

This novel may, at first glance, seem to be the story of Gwyn's return to the truths of his Celtic lineage. On the level of narrative, there is certainly a sustained criticism of the English contingent of the novel. The family for whom Gwyn's mother works are patronising and underestimate the power of the apparently mad, Welsh-speaking Huw Halfbacon. Amongst themselves, they speak a pointedly polite, vacuous English.

'Hello, Dad,' said Roger.

'Jolly good,' said his father.

'I'll light the lamps for you.'

'No need. I'm only pottering.'<sup>30</sup>

In conversation with the (later vindicated) Huw, the disrespect that can hide behind English politeness becomes clear.

'There is a man being killed at that place,' said Huw: 'old time.'

'Was there now!'

'Yes,' said Huw. 'He has been taking the other man's wife.'

'That's a bit off, I must say', said Clive.

(*Owl Service*, p.31)

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<sup>30</sup> Alan Garner, *The Owl Service* (London: Lions, 1973), p.20.

Clive, in effect, corrects Huw's present time sequence, presuming it to be the product of illiteracy. We, on the other hand, already suspect that Huw's choice of tense is correct, reflects a deep truth; for this murder *is* eternally happening in a constant present. Conversely, Roger (son of the English family) feels excluded by Welsh-speaking neighbours; it is left to Gwyn to point out the cultural imperialism in such an attitude.

'How would they have liked it if we'd started up in French?'

'Very thoughtless, yes: seeing as they're Welsh round here.'

(*Owl Service*, p.40)

Pursuing this line, then, one might argue that Gwyn is in conflict with the English culture that threatens to rob him of his birthright and so forth. In recognizing Huw as his father, and holder of the secret of his destiny (pp.134-5) Gwyn would, then, arrive at a still point, satiation, relieved of conflict. This argument, however, could only conceivably belong to the plot development and the opposition of characters into discrete language groups. If one is truly to pursue the matter in terms of the diction of the characters, one must consider the internal contradictions of Gwyn, from which the plot resolution offers no respite. From this angle, Gwyn can be seen negotiating a number of tongues, each relating to an aspect of his linguistic history, to the specific concurrence of linguistic practices/institutions that have marked him.

'You know I won't have you speaking Welsh. I've not struggled all these years in Aber to have you talk like a labourer. I could have stayed in the valley if I'd wanted that.'

'But Mam, I got to practise! It's exams next year.'

'If I'd known you was going to be filled with that squit you'd never have gone to the Grammar.'

(*Owl Service*, pp.16-17)

Already, there are three language communities in conflict in these few lines, all centred on the working class, Grammar School boy Gwyn. From his mother's point of view, there is the Welsh of his fathers, mark of his inferiority, and the Standard English that he must learn to escape it. This is the choice thrust upon Gwyn, who is trying to balance the contradictory requirements of the different spheres in which he must function. Neither, however, is actually spoken in the passage. There is a third tongue that Gwyn has to negotiate; the working class dialect of English that he must use to communicate with his mother. For as she later adds, on the same theme:

'I've not slaved all these years in Aber so you can look down your nose at me like one of them.'

(*Owl Service*, p.58)

Gwyn's dilemma is a familiar one; how does one aspire without growing to despise his point of departure? Thus, depending on audience, Gwyn is constantly reacting to create, or to disrupt, some partial, contingent, linguistic community, even when he is only talking to himself. Faced with shining lights in a marsh, almost overwhelmed by superstitious dread, he accuses himself of atavism.

How do I stop from going mad? [...] Think man! You're not a peasant! Do something! Use your loaf!

(*Owl Service*, p.62)

Like Alice, he pins his sanity on an educational miscellany.

"1536, Statute of Union! 1543, Wales divided into twelve counties! Representatives sent to Westminster!" "Matter consists of – of three – three classes of substance! An Element! A – a Compound! And a mixture! Describe an experiment!" Mam! [...]'

(*Owl Service*, pp.62-3)

Thus eventually he arrives at the answer.

'CH<sub>4</sub>' he said. 'CH<sub>4</sub>? One atom of carbon and four atoms of hydrogen. That's – methane –. Methane!'

(*Owl Service*, p.63)

For the moment, rationality and science, and their language have triumphed; hence his residual, native self must be stamped upon.

Oaf.

Peasant.

Welsh git.

(*Owl Service*, p.63)

In the path that leads from Will-o-the-Wisp to Methane, what emerges is the partiality of each name; the one alerts us to the gaps in the other, such that neither can lay sovereign claim to pure reference. The central thread of the plot of *The Owl Service* may lead Gwyn back to a respect for the mysterious Welsh past that cannot be rationally explained, but the path has been so well trodden in the interim, backwards and

forwards, that final repose is far from secured. So Gwyn is constantly changing position in relation to the linguistic and social expectations of those around him. Presented with English rationality, Gwyn half-ironically simulates the peasant that he wants to escape above.

'What did you have to wreck that painting for, you Welsh oaf?'

'Master Roger,' said Gwyn, 'there's asking for a poke in the gob you are, indeed to goodness, look you.'

(*Owl Service*, p.83)

Roger's accusation is remarkably similar to that which, in the marsh, Gwyn has levelled at himself. The source of the accusation makes a difference in as far as the response to Roger is one of defiance, yet in neither is there any third place for Gwyn to go to free himself of English/Welsh position-taking. None of this will yield a linguistic identity for Gwyn, Welsh, English, or otherwise, in spite of what might be read as the narrative's broad contention of a return to a traditional truth. Taking the point of view of Gwyn, as we are invited to do, the novel dramatises the social aspect of language as compromise, confrontation, something at least partially external that must be manipulated. There is, in effect, no community of interpretation and utterance. From *The Owl Service*, then, one might want to put forward a model of linguistic resistance quite different to that attempted in the *Quartet*; one that acknowledges the need to enter into, become competent in, dominant discourses, if any challenge is to be made at all. Furthermore, the partial nature of transition from local to standard culture would be acknowledged, and the possibility of self-sufficient cultural wholeness questioned. Indeed, and this is perhaps the most important point, if one draws even further back from the framing of the text and ceases even to

psychologize Gwyn as the vessel of certain discourses, one is left with the reader himself, whose path across the surface texture of the text is anything but smooth and level. Identifications may be made, and positions taken on the basis of the narrative argument of the text yet the reader must still negotiate a text whose language is not at one with itself.

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Rough-hew it how you will, then, *The Owl Service* is an inadequate vessel for the sort of seamless congruence of language and theme for which *The Stone Book Quartet* is praised. Perhaps this explains the lower position of *The Owl Service* in the Garner canon. For it is by no means seen as a destination, but a relay on the way to something greater. We are to see Garner's work as a progressive stripping away of the Latinate, standard and literary which culminates in *The Stone Book Quartet*, which "may well be its author's finest achievement" (Townsend, *Written for Children*, p.258). For, in effect, the *Quartet* has been seen as a resolution of the identity-threatening contradictions seen above in *The Owl Service*.

Garner's formal education removed him from his natural background of rural Cheshire craftsmen, with their ancient skills, their language, traditions, stories. In his *Stone Book* quartet – perhaps his masterpiece – he has attempted to resolve his own tensions, re-establishing himself, in his own way, as a writer/craftsman, in his own local culture, and establishing his own identity and place in his long family history.

(McVitty, p.377)

Gwyn and, to a certain extent, Tom from *Red Shift* can thus be collapsed into Garner's own biography. The identity problems of the former character, and psychosis of the latter, which reflect Garner's own contradictory education, reach a point of rest, and only then does the masterpiece emerge, in which a "humanity" previously lacking "is abundantly present" (Townsend, *Written for Children*, p.259). Thus, its place in the broader canon of literature and culture is assured.



The Stone Book Quartet seems likely to survive as a literary peak; one can imagine observers of the future remarking that Alan Garner's work was a symphony rousing the intellectual young reader to an awareness of the dying crafts that once gave man his dignity [...].

(Moss, 'The Seventies in British Children's Books', p.145)

Garner's very career, it would seem, presents a backtracking into a purer stage of existence, and can help the reader to do the same; *The Owl Service* seems to have been dwelt upon (by critics) with less interest, perhaps seen as a passing phase. In the *Quartet*, Garner has achieved that most coveted of goals; true peasanthood. For he has stripped off the lendings of his induction into modern society and rediscovered the core of his organic heritage. There, he is

concerned with the transmission of skills, the wisdom that resides in work, and continuity of life in an intimately known landscape.

(Townsend, *Written for Children*, p.259)

Rousseau was amongst those who, seeing the dangers of getting into positions of power, and the attendant corruption, sited freedom amongst those powerless people at the lower end of the class scale. For "freedom not power, is the greatest good. That man is truly free who desires what he is able to perform, and does what he desires" (*Émile*, p.48). One does the child no favours by teaching him the language of government and reason when he will be far happier amongst the tillers of fields.

Let the child's vocabulary, therefore, be limited; it is very undesirable that he should have more words than ideas, that he should be able to say more than he

thinks. One of the reasons that peasants are generally shrewder than townsfolk is, I think, that their vocabulary is smaller. They have few ideas, but those few are thoroughly grasped.

(*Émile*, p.40)

There is a notion here of pure community, untainted by the wicked world of trade and government that was important for early progressive educational experiments. Here, a horizontal, soft government would, ideally, produce friendly peasants, suitably flattered by the apparent envy of their middle class patrons, who would become entirely spontaneous and sincere proselytes of their pure existence. From a man like Vehrli, a disciple of Pestalozzi, Dr J.P. Kay, whose role in British education we have already mentioned, could "learn" the value of making the educational establishment an enclave of an endangered (actually, in Britain, long extinct) species of worker.

"I am a peasant's son. I wish to be no other than I am, the teacher of the sons of the peasantry. You are welcome to my meal: it is coarse and homely, but it is offered cordially. These potatoes are our own. We won them from the earth, and therefore we need no dainties, for our appetite is gained by labour, and the fruit of our toil is always savoury."

Here was true philosophy: resigned and grateful acceptance, honest and non-aggressive independence.

(Smith, pp.63-64)

It has already been suggested that Kay's aim (and Pestalozzi's) was to lead the lower orders into satisfaction with their actual station. Yet this is not entirely true of Kay; for here it is a matter of convincing an industrial working class that they are the heroic recreators of a class to which few, if

any had belonged in Britain for a very long time – the peasantry. Once convinced, however, these “peasants” could be paraded expounding the joyous autonomy of their way of life, the independence of the freeholder. Here is Vehrli once more, advising Kay.

“There is no knowledge in books like an immediate converse with nature, and those that dig the soil have nearest communion with her [...]. Wisdom consists in the discovery of the truth that what is *without* is not the source of sorrow, but that which is *within*. A peasant may be happier than a prince if his conscience be pure before God.

(Smith, p.69)

Doubtless there was a perfectly sincere tear in the eye of Kay on hearing such high sentiments. Yet there is no record that he ever felt tempted to doff his frock coat and seize the plough, for spectacle remains spectacle for just as long as one stays in the audience. The system of education that valorises oral, organic culture is at its most effective when it provides the script for an initial performance that will grab the imagination of future performers of this gratifying fiction. Thus emerges the peasant proselyte, pleasantly unaware of his debt to middle class pupil/teacher system, of which he is a historical product.

Similar elements of spectacle, recovery of a lost class status, and the dignity of honest toil recur in the critical acclaim for Garner's *Quartet* outlined above. Adoring critics of all classes united in the peasant idyll gather round the text that goes the furthest back into Garner's putative roots. He is congratulated not so much for having written a book as for his choice of life; for it is a curious slippage that sees the writing of a text which *represents* pure peasanthood as being itself a peasant craft. Garner,

it should be noted, is published by HarperCollins, which is by no means a cottage industry. Similarly, it is hard to believe that his writing career owes nothing to a formal education. Thus, criticism tends to cast as a remembering and recovery of an ancestral past what is arguably a forgetting of precisely the difficult process that leads Gwyn, his most interesting hero, out of the valley.

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The business of organicism will require more extensive discussion in the following chapters, but first a brief look at an alternative idea of language is needed. For there is, of course, another tradition of language in kiddie-lit, and it is one that might be thought too powerful to ignore. Against the plain speech of the peasant one might produce Lewis Carroll's *Alice* – a book so powerful that it almost resembles a canon in itself. The *Alice* books play with the elements of language in a thoroughly material manner, as objects in themselves; meanings are anything but transparent, or rather, the wrong meanings manifest themselves through the veil of the word. Over-literal interpretations are concretised into living entities, whose existence is based on the rules of grammar and idiom rather than nature; the dynamic of the text is associative rather than referential. *Alice* can scarcely be disowned, so how is she to be made compatible with the simple, the organic and the oral?

A moral argument *can* be adduced to save *Alice* for the natural language project. *Alice* – the text and the character – can be read as a critic of the nonsense produced by the artifice of language run riot. She persistently encounters beings whose lives are run, to an unreasonable extent, by a spurious, Sophistic reason. Her progress is that of the innocent through the jungle of adult reason at its worst, characteristically appearing in the form of such abysmal didacts as Humpty Dumpty. This line of argument is, indeed, sustainable from the text, slotting it back into the Darton narrative as *Alice* questions, or is confounded by, the truth behind language, which consistently lets her down. Wonderland is, thus, a nightmare where the machinic/systematic aspects of language have taken over, and experience is eschewed in favour of syntax; a *reductio* of

the classroom. Such a reading would tend to make the books into illustrations of the importance of restricting language, a critique of excessive trope. Thus, for Julia Briggs, in *Alice*,

the whole system of educating children through their reading is mocked in a series of parodic verses, quasi-improving dialogues, and self-examining monologues that simply send up the favourite techniques of a great deal of earlier children's literature [...].

(Briggs, 'Women Writers', p.239)

This argument works by centring on Alice the human being, who withstands the buffets of external bureaucracy.

In *Alice* herself Lewis Carroll created a little girl who refuses to become an object, who won't be intimidated by the constant stream of orders and instructions she receives, and who remains firmly in command of herself.

(Briggs, 'Women Writers', p.240)

In another essay in the same collection, John Batchelor also proceeds to minimise the materiality of the text by identification, by assuming that the child reader stands in the place of Alice and watches the nonsense from without.

I take it that Alice is the focus of interest and that the reader shares her perspective.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> John Batchelor, 'Dodgson, Carroll, and the Emancipation of Alice', in *Children and their Books*, pp.181-199 (p.186).

From this point, Batchelor may even develop the text as an essay against the perils of text.

In *Alice in Wonderland* the learning process is Wordsworthian [...] in being anti-bookish (she is attracted by pictures and conversations but bored by unadorned prose text).

(Batchelor, 'Dodgson', p.186)

Batchelor then goes on to recount passages which can be read as explicit criticism of didacts; Miss Prickett the Liddell governess, we learn, is behind the pedantic mouse spouting history<sup>32</sup> and so forth. He nevertheless concedes that in *Through the Looking-Glass* "bookishness has higher standing" (p.186). The point has also been made by Townsend.

The striking difference is that for better or worse *Looking-Glass* is much more contrived than *Wonderland*. The earlier book was based on actual stories told to children; the later one was written at leisure to please the author himself.

(*Written for Children*, p.72)

In spite of his equivocation – "for better or worse" – the point has been made. *Through the Looking-Glass* is far less Alice's book, far less "oral", and thus, apparently, not quite so "actual". The reader's encounter with bookish learning, overt linguistic artifice, ought to be subordinated to Alice's guiding hand; we are to share her disapproval. This, apparently, does not emerge with sufficient force from the second of the Alice books.

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<sup>32</sup> To find the source of this nugget, one has only to dip into; Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, ed. by Martin Gardner, rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.46 n.1. All further quotations from Carroll are taken from this edition.

Thus a supremely materialist text (considering the two as one) that has been taken up as such by Dadaists and Surrealists, and has some affinity with what may be coyly termed a Symbolist tradition, is explained as a pseudo-realistic *essay on* materialist language. The excesses of language present are thus case studies in madness.

Madness is a matter of unaccountability, mysteries in the speech or behaviour of others: in all our interactions we need to believe that our interlocutor has a motive for what he says or does.

(Batchelor, 'Dodgson', p.189)

Assuming as he does that the figures who march through the pages of the Alice books are characters pure and simple, examples of people one might meet, Batchelor arrives at a curiously grim diagnosis of the text. Yet, where is the pleasure in the Alice-text if not precisely in language's ticklish capacity for producing nonsense, creating imaginary objects? For nonsense, and nowhere more thoroughly than in Carroll, surely proceeds by making perfectly feasible grammatical/logical structures, then filling them with dummy bullets. The subject ejaculates, from the pistol of the quite comprehensible sentence, fake flowers. The Alice stories are, in short, full of declarations which, like those of the Hatter "have no sort of meaning" but are "certainly English".(Carroll, p.97)

Thus playing cards who live in fear of the Queen of Hearts and throw themselves "flat on their faces" (Carroll, p.106) when she arrives, owe their behaviour, at least in part, to their verbal existence *as* playing cards. When Alice wonders if she ought to follow suit, and lie flat on her face, but cannot remember "having ever heard of such a rule" (Carroll, p.107), the reason is simple; she is not a playing card but is unhappily



caught in a space that behaves, for the moment, in accord with the rules of cards.

Alice is not fundamentally opposed to the rule of law, however arbitrary. Indeed she is "very much pleased at having found out a new rule" when it strikes her that it may be "pepper that makes people hot-tempered" (Carroll, p.119). What distresses her is the constant shifting of the ground as one arbitrary gives way to another, sometimes from sentence to sentence in a given exchange. Thus, the Duchess remarks

"Flamingoes and mustard both bite. And the moral of that is - 'Birds of a feather flock together.'"

(Carroll, p.121)

Alice points out that mustard is not a bird, but a mineral, and the Duchess agrees.

"There's a large mustard-mine near here. And the moral of that is - 'The more there is of mine, the less there is of yours.'"

(Carroll, pp.121-2)

To state the obvious, the Duchess works by picking up on words and blithely applying them in unrelated, though feasible, phrases. Alice herself is not innocent of such word-play. Asked by the caterpillar who she is, she admits she does not know.

"At least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

(Carroll, p.67)

The caterpillar demands an explanation, to which Alice replies;

"I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, Sir, [...] because I'm not myself, you see."

(Carroll, p.67)

The whole scene has, in effect, been leading up to this pun on the simple, common idiom, *to not be oneself* today. Similarly, Chapter IV, entitled "The Rabbit Sends in a Little Bill", leads to the punch line where Bill the lizard is *sent in* to get the giant Alice out of Rabbit's house (Carroll, p.61). Such play works by, if you like, presenting reifications of common verbal idioms. A *character* called Little Bill exists only in so far as his name provides the opportunity for word play. If one finds the Alice books at all humorous or enjoyable, the humour surely lies in this sort of thing. It is worth pausing to reflect that the fundamentalists of the simple voice, in the very act of righteously denouncing didacticism, entirely miss all of this, being far more interested in rehearsing a rather grim, not to say didactic, lesson on the perils of pedantry.

## chapter three

### Natural Language; a Botanical Survey

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Every botanist who has had children with him in the woods and lanes must have noticed how eagerly they joined in his pursuits [...].

(Spencer, *Education*, p.80)

Having decided on the peasant as a model of good living, it might seem a sensible idea to get out of the educational establishment and head for the country. In the education and living pages of the liberal press, one often finds such latter-day pioneers who, disillusioned with classroom practice, see in the countryside, or even in an urban pastoral, the right place of education. Concurrent with the physical move is an ideological *déménagement*. So a former teacher who stages creative writing courses in the countryside is celebrated, in this spirit, for his heretical claim that messy writing, crossings out etc, are an essential part of (creative) writing.

Not the sort of lesson you'd expect from a former head of English at a secondary school. But Dennis Pepper doesn't teach in a school any longer, he writes and edits children's books.<sup>1</sup>

Pepper has left behind the didactic and the stuffy classroom and moved into the open field of kiddie-lit. The implication, however, is not that he has ceased to teach; rather that he has intensified his efforts. What form, then, will this education through creative writing take? Interestingly, it reflects much that is already present in kiddie-lit itself.

The teacher's first move is into the country, to take "long riverside walks". The children then "sat in fields and described what they saw" (Beckett, p.25). The first step in the most rudimentary narrative theory

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Beckett, 'Another Fine Writing Mess', *Guardian*, July 14 1992, p.25.

has been made; the scene has been set. The success of such a scheme might be supposed to lie in the child's affinity with nature, and would thus issue in writing *on* nature. What is remarkable in this report is not so much that the children's writing itself that is cited does *not* seem to have taken the hint, but that this is acknowledged by neither teacher nor reporting journalist. Thus even writing for which the country setting is of supreme inconsequence is read in the light of the child's liberation *by* nature.

Out of Pepper's group came some writing which was subversive: "I forged my mum's signature on the letter to my teacher," wrote one girl [...].

(Beckett, p.25)

Even "Martian" poems may be attempted if the rural life is first invoked: "They saw a sign which gave them a starting point: National Trust." It is apparently of vital import to know that "Heather Eyles [another such teacher] took her story-writing group on a long walk", yet once more the child's writing offered as proof of the efficacy of such a method seems, to this critic, to take something of a tangent.

"We also look at the spirit of places," says Heather. "We went to see what inspiration we could get from the river and its surroundings." Perhaps from this came Ashley's story about Joe, captured by mad scientists who feed him animal genes.

(Beckett, p.25)

One can think of many more likely sources for such a tale than "the spirit of places". Even so, this unstoppable faith in the countryside is quite normal in progressive kiddie-discourse at the interface between

education and literature. And, indeed, this is precisely a matter of *faith*. For the countryside<sup>2</sup> seems to contain a metaphysical value that can be accessed by physical contact; something of its goodness rubs off on one. This goodness, as we will see, is particularly germane to the child mind, for it is here that

the children in [Rosemary Sutcliff's] books spring free; they run with the air of Devon (or the Downs or the Lakes) fresh in their nostrils, climb, swim, ride, with joy and vigour. They are touched by the wand of a wizard.<sup>3</sup>

Whether one is dealing with real or fictional children, the countryside is the site for freedom and magic par excellence, in stark contrast to the schoolroom.

Organic metaphor has been one of child-centred theory's great successes. In elaborating their developmental ideas, the early nineteenth-century pioneers were wont to turn to the natural world for inspiration. Froebel, who would name his new scheme of nurture the *kindergarten*, is particularly florid. His writing is replete with similes too lengthy and dull to quote in full that start something like "as the newborn child, like a ripe kernel of seed corn dropped from the mother plant".<sup>4</sup> The child is a

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this chapter, the terms "nature", "countryside", and "the garden" will be used almost interchangeably to denote different fictional manifestations of similar symbolic terrains. As I hope will become apparent, they are conceptual synonyms. Some tensions between these terms will be tackled in the following chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Elaine Moss, 'Rosemary Sutcliff: A Love of Legend', in *Part of the Pattern*, pp.17-19 (p.17) (first publ. in *Books and Bookmen*, 1960).

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Froebel, *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten: Or, His Ideas Concerning the Play and Playthings of the Child*, trans. by Josephine Jarvis (London: Edward Arnold, 1897), p.23.

living, growing, hence *developing*, thing. As a part of Nature, the child ought to contemplate Nature.

It is quite essential to the spirit and character of these means of fostering independent action in the child that they should lead to the thoughtful observation of Nature and of life in all its parts and phenomena [...].

(Froebel, p.20)

Important to Froebel's notion of the child's place in nature, uniting the functions of participant and observer, is that of wholeness, holism. Education ought to lead one into that state of totality in which

a single, fundamental principle of culture observable in Nature, authenticated by history, and proving itself to be purely human, forms a stable coherent whole, all the parts of which reciprocally explain and mutually benefit one another. This whole, therefore, resembles a tree with its many branches.

(Froebel, p.19)

It can be seen that this totality is lent a certain quality by Froebel's metaphor of the tree; it is quite *true*, because it belongs to the same, *natural* order it describes. From ripe kernel to adult tree, Froebel's language mirrors the profusion, fertility and inter-relatedness it proposes, as organic metaphor flows in and out of organic metaphor. Universality, far from remaining an unspoken assumption in Froebel, is his explicit claim.

As the flower bud of the tree – connected with twig, branch, and trunk, with the whole ramification of root and crown, and, through this double ramification, with earth and heaven – stands in united coherence and reciprocal exchange with the

whole universe for the development and vivification of its being, so stands man also, in all-sided developing life-exchange with nature, with humanity, and with all spiritual efforts and influences – with universal life.

(Froebel, p.7)

Unlike his idea for the kindergarten, Froebel's rather frighteningly exuberant prose style, infinitely extensible analogies and hyper-platonism have not really caught on. Nevertheless, the central ideas of natural development, and the deployment of organic metaphor in its adumbration, are common features of paedocentrism from its infancy. Thus, Pestalozzi is rather more sober, but professes the same equivalence of nature and freedom.

Suddenly, after five years of blissful sensuous life, we banish all Nature from their eyes; we peremptorily put an end to the captivating period of uncontrolled freedom; we herd them together like sheep in an evil-smelling room; for hours, days, weeks, months, and years, we chain them unmercifully to the contemplation of miserable and monotonously unexciting alphabets, and condemn them to an existence which, in comparison with their former life, is repulsive in the extreme [...].

(Pestalozzi, p.89)

At this first moment of the educational revolution, one can see how reasonably, once shorn of Froebel's hyperbole, the picture of clear uncomplicated nature seems to counter the (undoubtedly) grim educational practices that were current. The opposition runs on, however, even further. One is accustomed to speak



as if the art of the teacher did everything for the human race, and Nature nothing.

[...] And yet, in fact, it is Nature alone which accomplishes the good.

(Pestalozzi, p.91)

One can see here the central importance of nature to child-centred thinking. It is not merely a lesson, but the teacher himself, the ultimate *jardinière d'enfants*. Rather than being a matter of "driving a team" education ought to be a question of

drawing out of the child what was already there, of stimulating, not of putting in.

(Pestalozzi, p.92)

Thus, in the developmental view, we can see the interdependence of nature and the minimisation of the teacher's role. In 1939 it was possible for Frank Smith, in his (and A.S. Harrison's) *Principles of Class Teaching*, a work that seeks to synthesize child-centred theories into a workable practice, to claim for this view – the developmentalism of Froebel and Pestalozzi – that it "has slowly won almost universal acceptance".<sup>5</sup> From oppositional polemic, organic rhetoric has grown to be second nature.

Nevertheless, this rhetoric has faced particularly strong criticism from more recent educationalists anxious to sort out the wheat from the chaff in child-centred theory. For Harold Entwistle (citing Schaffler) the problem is that,

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<sup>5</sup> Frank Smith and A.S. Harrison, *Principles of Class Teaching* (London: Macmillan, 1939), p.22.

the naturalist's growth or plant metaphor insufficiently recognizes the cultural influence of the child's environment [...].

(Entwistle, p.155)

The pseudo-universal description of the environment in vegetable terms mystifies the intricate machinery of socialisation. Artifice, abolished on the theoretical plane through metaphor, is left out of the account, leaving the theory unable to cope with the very world it faces.

Indeed, it is in failing to cater for this fact that the child is surrounded by a multitude of civilized artefacts that the naturalist plant or growth metaphor beloved of child-centred educationists breaks down.

(Entwistle, p.100)

Unfortunately, as Entwistle himself goes on to concede, the metaphor has not broken down, but indeed continues to have great force and influence, even to this day. The question occurs to one; why does such a patently false notion retain such power and scope? Coming from a different angle, R.F. Dearden complains that the notion of growth is central to such texts,

yet in spite of its importance one searches in vain for an adequate and coherent elucidation of the concept. Rather, it functions as a symbolic image, pregnant with meaning and rich in emotional appeal.

(Dearden, p.25)

This seems closer to the mark. For any theory is not merely a set of ideas or commandments to be carried out in sequence, but a piece of writing, and may, therefore gain, to a greater or lesser extent, autonomy as

such. Analogy can become aestheticized as an object in itself, drifting from its strictly descriptive function to become something more lush, emotive, ornamental. To put this another way, what one must consider here is the pleasure of the vegetable notion of childhood for its readers and writers; a consideration that may put the theoretical texts in question squarely in the court of literary criticism. In as far, then, as a text may be categorised according to the sort of audience response that it invites, organic pedagogy, I would suggest, aspires to the condition of fiction.

Not for the last time in this thesis I have to report that hard, cold, and increasingly lonely, analysis is eschewed in favour of the problematically fictive joys of the child in the garden. The fact that Deardens and Entwistles have come and gone and yet organicism still persists hardly proves it adequate as theory, but is indeed a testament to the power of its symbols. This is a power which according to Dearden, can result in a distorted perception of the child's classroom behaviour. So, for instance

we find that children who do not want to make creative models out of cornflake packets, or who do not want to do whatever 'wholesome growth' requires, are regarded as having nasty little wills resistant to the loving teacher's beneficent ministrations.

(Dearden, p.35)

Organic rhetoric is quite equal to the challenge. Every garden, one might retort, philosophically, has its weeds. This is an angle whose possibilities have not escaped committed child-centred teachers. Thus, for Arthur Razzell, the good and bad classroom are the respective results of good and bad gardening. The good classroom is as follows.

Certainly the good teacher will have children's work displayed, but it will be set out with considerable thought for the overall appearance of the display. Well-tended plants will be arranged with various objects and pictures of quality. This is indirect teaching, for children have much to learn about display, and a pride to cultivate in setting out their work.

(Razzell, p.34)

The class is an organic whole, a picture, a *spectacle*, of health. The well-tended plant will be there in the flesh, but also as a living emblem of the whole. The bad classroom, on the other hand, is the home of "strange, mutant plants dying of malnutrition" (Razzell, p.33). It is not clear whether these plants are actual classroom accoutrements, providing a symbolic display in space as they do in text, or the pupils themselves. Indeed, there is an easy slippage between the two ideas, for they are felt to be identical. Healthy plant *means* healthy child. The very proximity of nature, in whatever form, is the supreme teacher. It is thus in the country that the teacher plays the most unobtrusive role.

The children learnt, in fact, by the very air they breathed.

(Razzell, p.22)

It is the literalism of such a statement that both Entwistle and Dearden miss. One would have to do more than argue theoretically to persuade a Razzell that he was mistaken; there is more commitment, more belief, here than the casual use of metaphor entails. For Razzell, as for many other devotees of the child-centred tradition, this is the central, organising metaphor; one whose tendrils have a firm hold on every area of his thought. New ideas "take root in the new ground" (p.81), or are

"readily pollinated by being seen in action" (p.82). It extends outside the classroom, into history; we are thus asked to "consider some of the recent developments in the junior school and the roots from which they have grown." (p.11) Such instances, taken in isolation *might* seem otiose. Sheer weight of numbers, and the ability of the metaphor to span the whole range between convenient analogy and literal terrain, however, suggest otherwise. In any case, as I have already suggested, they gravitate around a quite literal belief in the nutritional value of the rural scene. In the country the educational avant-garde may be showing the way for the rest of us.

Education is living, and it is likely that some of these rural school experiments will lead the way to a much closer integration of the school with the community, and to a greater parental share in the all-round education of the child.

(Razzell, p.81)

We have all to learn from the countryside, and, as far as possible, transplant its lessons to the city. For city-dwellers have lost touch with the soil that nourishes our souls.

Talking with the children, it was quite clear that they had no remaining natural ties with the land.

(Razzell, p.78)

It is not entirely flippant to claim that what we see here is a literary production *manquée*. Nor is this merely a matter of pointing out the predominance of metaphor of dubious standing. Such ideas speak from a post-Romantic sensibility that has also produced the notion of literature as the ideal vehicle for the organic education, which has arguably been more

successful than its strictly pedagogical cousin in grounding its claims. For, in spite of its elaboration of the child/plant analogy, the form of theoretical writing does not allow its full fictional possibilities, and cannot quite make the claims to transcendence that literature is often allowed to make. To show this more fully, however, another, parallel, approach is required.

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Kiddie-lit would seem to have followed the same nature-bound course as pedagogy. Thus Harvey Darton asserts that John Brinsley's edition of Aesop (*Aesop's Fables*, 1624), for all its insistence on morals, is redeemed by the country knowledge of its author.

The daw in borrowed plumes [...] is here turned into a 'Cornish chough'. Brinsley, fortunate man, must have seen one, and passed on the knowledge to schoolboys. He was not a prattling Holofernes, but a man who had had a young mind and seen English country sights. This is an advance towards the making of a genuine children's book.

(Darton, p.11).

Implicit here is Darton's recurrent narrative of progress from pedantic instruction (Holofernes) to spiritual enrichment through literary entertainment: but on this occasion it is recast as a desertion, comparable to that of Pestalozzi and Froebel, of the dusty schoolroom for the open air. Hence, Darton starts the chapter from which the above is quoted with "Let us leave the schoolroom" (p.11). Once one has done so, it is implied, one proceeds directly to the countryside. This is also a movement from public to private, as is clear from the case of the author of *The Butterfly's Ball* (1807), praised, like Brinsley, as a harbinger of modern child feeling.

It was written by a most respectable historian, William Roscoe (1753-1831), M.P. for Liverpool, and 'an accomplished botanist'. [...] As he did not let his serious public occupations master his private life, he endures still [...].

(Darton, pp.199-200)

Presumably, botany belongs to the private sphere, at least in as far as it entails country walks. Thus, nature allows a space for a privacy that can counter the harsh public world. Critics, writers and teachers seem to claim for themselves and others a sensitivity to nature as a sort of badge of disinterested discernment. Thus, when Brian Alderson compliments Darton in his 'Preface' to the third edition of *Children's Books in England*, he does so in terms of this *al fresco* ethic.

All his life he had walked the English countryside, developing a keen sense of the relationship that subsists between man and the landscape in which he lives [...].

(Darton, p.xi)

Alderson, in effect, reiterates Darton's own criterion for praising a Brinsley; one avoids pedantry best in the fields. The flight from the language of scholarship is all the more remarkable when one considers the relegation of Darton's prodigious bibliographical activities thus effected. Born into a publishing family and possessed of a vast collection of antique kiddie-lit, Darton marshalled a range of musty texts that no single researcher has since managed to equal. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that *Children's Books in England* was not entirely researched and composed on long bracing walks. Yet, when Alderson does get round to acknowledging this side of Darton's activities, this is, in a sense, what he suggests. For we see Darton "pioneering his way through many a bibliographical thicket" (Darton, p.xiii), a pursuit complementary to the nature ramble and not at all redolent of dusty reading rooms. Having served his novitiate in the Ur-text, the English countryside, Darton's whole approach to text in general can safely be declared organic.



At any rate, there is a clear qualitative difference between the reading and writing of the nature lover, and that of the desiccated pedant. The former is suffused with the value of the nature it contemplates: there is a sort of reading/writing that is, in some sense, natural. Parallelisms between book and garden are not uncommon in the post-Romantic discourse of the child. So, for example, C.S. Lewis can categorise

the sort of look people have when you are visiting a garden they've made or reading a story they've written.

(*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, p.66)

Catherine Sinclair makes a similar collocation, quoting Paley's remark that

any amusement which is innocent is better than none; as the writing of a book, the building of a house, the laying out of a garden, the digging of a fish-pond, even the raising of a cucumber [...].

(*Holiday House*, p.11)

What starts as a casual list of "innocent" pursuits gradually reveals a submerged, metonymic narrative coherence; one writes, then builds, then adds garden, then adorns it with fish pond and cultivates it with simples and salads. *Beatus Ille* indeed; such is the good life of the children's writer. So Mrs Ewing, we hear,

set about making a garden. Gardens were to be of great importance in her life and so, inevitably, in her works.

(Laski, p.34)

Here are two complementary pursuits that flow in and out of, and thus enrich, each other, *inevitably*. In this model of reading, text and land are commutative and recognize each other, since the same symbolic structure can house both practices; thus it is that when one returns to a place, for Darton – according to Brian Alderson – it is like “reading an old book which is still alive”; one enters into “a dialogue with the past that heighten[s] one’s sense of the present” (Darton, p.xi). The series of associations that make reading and rambling interlocking disciplines is thus firmly in place in the text – *Children’s Books in England* – from which most critical histories of kiddie-lit take their critical year zero.

What is more, this reflects a belief already present in kiddie-lit itself. By the time of *The Secret Garden* this is a commonplace notion that has found its way into the text itself.

‘Mother says there’s no reason why any child should live that gets no fresh air an’ doesn’t do nothin’ but lie on his back an’ read picture-books.’<sup>6</sup>

Sickly Colin can read all the books of exotic animals he likes; only the garden can cure him of his malaise, and only then will books be a safe option. Thus, when Mary is unwell, Mr Craven’s suggested regime is as follows.

‘She must be less delicate before she begins lessons. Give her simple, healthy food. Let her run wild in the garden. Don’t look after her too much. She needs liberty and fresh air and romping about.’

(Burnett, p.104)

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<sup>6</sup> Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1951), p.122.

So it is not surprising that Colin (whose regime of books first, nature second is the exact opposite) has such a hystericised relationship with the world. Mary wonders

'if it would not do him good to go out into a garden and watch things growing. It did me good.'

(Burnett, p.122)

Martha the maid replies with an account of Colin's latest fit, which seems to further strengthen Mary's thesis.

'He'd been readin' in a paper about people gettin' somethin' he called "rose cold", an' he began to sneeze an' said he'd got it [...].'

(Burnett, p.122)

The diagnosis is, in effect, that the proper order of coming to knowledge has been inverted, and hysteria has ensued. It only remains for Mary to take him to the garden to be cured. As one recent critic has put it, with not a trace of irony:

It is this possibility of transformation that takes hold of the reader's imagination – a wholesome growth, nurtured and applauded by a whole chorus of earthily wise, rosy-cheeked peasants who know the virtues of hard work and self-sufficiency.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Michele Landsberg, *The World of Children's Books: A Guide to Choosing the Best* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p.100.

*The Secret Garden* marks a crucial point in the development of kiddie-lit in providing a clear exposition of this mixture of devotion to nature and ambivalence towards text. To each pursuit – that of romping, and that of reading – a proper time and place may be allotted. Thus, while *The Secret Garden* by no means originates the relation of childish innocence to wonder in nature, it has become a powerful metonym for a particular form they take in kiddie-lit. Its position as such will be discussed more fully in the following chapter. For the moment, let us stay with the relation imagined by critical thinkers between garden and child. Here is a sort of prescription for author, critic and child alike; the child, of whatever age, is to be placed in the garden.

Significantly, it is when Darton comes to his own era – the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, the moment of *The Secret Garden* – that organic rhetoric becomes most embedded in his writing. There is a feeling of arrival, of a literature finding its home, one in which the critic is quite comfortable. Here is a metaphor that has reached the truth of the child, and in the process abolished any barriers that might be assumed to lie between truth and metaphor. Thus, calling a book *A Child's Garden of Verse* is no textual conceit.<sup>8</sup>

It is a garden, full of natural flowers growing from wind-borne seeds.

(Darton, p.314)

Darton is not generally a florid writer, but it is precisely in the presence of flowers that some of their "wind-borne seeds" appear to have landed on his own plot. There is a palpable relief in the writing, as the

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<sup>8</sup>Anthology (Gr.) = a collection of flowers; hence also "garland" etc.

dusty historicism of preceding chapters, and all the qualifications in judgement necessitated by historical distance, are blown away by the thrill of recognition. Where previously he has been forced to stand apart from the text under consideration, and produce a historical account of it, here he can fling back at it its own stuff – flowers. At last the critic can write on a level with the text. The point at which the historical peters out into the purely literary is often, thus, also the point at which the organic becomes a *lingua franca* shared by author and critic. Where writers from the late Victorian era to the present are considered critically, the language of the garden is apt to be drawn into the critical text in this way, as if a bottom line of truth has been reached, and the critic need not diverge (that is, *criticise*), need not feel uneasy with paraphrase and tautology. This can apply even to very recent, theoretically informed critics such as Fred Inglis, when speaking of the tradition of Kenneth Grahame, E. Nesbit et al.;

Their books grow in the late and fertile flowering of cultivated property-owners in Victorian England.

(Inglis, p.123)

Organic metaphor is, of course, rife as chickweed in the English language. Yet here, I would argue, is a more than usually motivated usage. It is hard to say where mere metaphor ends and positive, literal statement begins. The apparent symmetry of garden in book and garden in life is seductive, seeming to point up a causal connection, or natural affinity. For Darton, certainly, the garden is no mere metaphor, alive or dead; it "is". The sheer accumulated weight of such references, their hardy persistence wherever the child and books are considered, suggests that they have a purpose; there is a certain justice felt in the constant association.

Nevertheless, there remain differences between the use of such metaphor in theoretical/critical texts, and that in works of fiction for children. For if the belief in a relation between organic metaphor and the actual influence of the land, such as leads creative writing teachers into the countryside, is to be carried into prose fiction, it must be conveyed within a coherently constructed landscape, which is assumed to be "real". Another way of putting this is that the theoretical text is rather poetic in its approach, whereas the novel must be, naturally, novelistic.

In critical texts, even those whose project is not entirely in sympathy with the organicist privileging of the countryside, a whole social world can be evoked with the merest adumbration of the oppositional unity of town and country. The findings of the Opies, in *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, can be seen as contesting organicist claims by representing the imagination of the city child as thriving. Studies previous to Norman Douglas, they point out, have passed over the "great warren of city backstreets where the mass of the nation's children are bred and brought up" (Opie, p.vi). Even here, however, it is necessary to invoke the standard opposition of town and country school.

The schools [in the survey] include small village schools in remote rural districts, such as one where squirrels steal from the pockets of children's coats hanging in the porch; and they include the grim barrack-like buildings to be seen in nearly every city.

(Opie, p.vii)

The country setting is felt to merit picturesque, *narrative* detail (the squirrel) in a way that the city is not. A possible fictional context is

adumbrated but need not be followed through in a way that might make it accountable as a representation of place. Functioning on the level of metonymy, the equivalence of country and wholesomeness is effortless. To carry this force throughout a whole, coherent fictional narrative is another matter; for here one is employing something that is not a mere unitary symbol, but must also function as a representation of the real. In a sense, organicist kiddie-lit is a sort of test case for, or attempted performance of, developmental/organic theory along these lines. Froebel and Pestalozzi, however, will not provide us with many clues on this matter; rather we should turn to Rousseau.

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Rousseau's *Emile* creates both possibilities and problems for child-centred educational theory and fiction. I say "possibilities" not only because it has been re-interpreted as fiction, notably by Thomas Day in *Sandford and Merton*; nor even because it involves Emile in fictions organised by Jean-Jacques the tutor. In addition to these are various musings that strictly speaking belong to the theoretical aspect of the text but which can nevertheless be made to furnish a remarkably complete linguistic theory for the writing of kiddie-lit. This is especially the case where setting is concerned. The country setting is not merely picturesque; nor is its value nebulous.

In the village a tutor will have much more control over the things he wishes to show the child [...].

(*Émile*, p.59)

One perceived advantage of the domain of the organic is that it presents us with the least problematic, most easily named of objects. A purely referential model of language can be made (at least to appear) to work, if it is limited to simple, honest objects. We may with reason be enjoined to "call a spade a spade" or "appeller un chat un chat", as long as cats and spades are at issue. For Rousseau, language is a minefield through which one is constrained to walk, but whose worst dangers can be skirted by avoiding abstraction. Meaning breaks down or becomes excessive where the verbal sign fails to match the object it describes.

This is one good reason why Emile is to be educated in the countryside, the natural thesaurus of an unproblematic vocabulary that



will not lead him into error. Thus, in the wake of Rousseau, emerges the idea that nature is the greatest of all books.

Wherever [Pestalozzi] found a leaf in the mysterious book of creation laid open, he gave it them to read, and thus, within the narrow sphere of their horizon, taught them more of earth and earthborn beings, than they could have learned by travelling in the pages of a heavy volume all round the globe.<sup>9</sup>

Here, with a solid, wholesome, physical landscape lying around him waiting to be named, the child can be allowed to wander at will, without straying into solecism.

Act in such a way that while he only notices external objects his ideas are confined to sensations; let him only see the physical world around him.

(*Émile*, p.53)

The natural laws of the land will be sufficient to teach him where error lies; thus even abstract, moral lessons are learnt through physical contact.

Keep the child dependent on things only. By this course of education you will have followed the order of nature. Let his unreasonable wishes meet with physical obstacles only, or the punishment which results from his own actions, lessons which will be recalled when the same circumstances occur again. It is enough to prevent him from wrong doing without forbidding him to do wrong. Experience or lack of

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<sup>9</sup> E. Biber, *Henry Pestalozzi and His Plan of Education: Being an Account of His Life and Writings: with Copious Extracts from his Works, and Extensive Details Illustrative of The Practical Parts of his Method* (London: John Souter, 1831), p.69.

power should take the place of law.

(*Émile*, p.49)

Thus, particularly in the earlier stages of "the development of the child and the natural growth of the human heart" (*Émile*, p.18), it is the landscape itself that is to be both tutor and lesson, operating through the law of natural consequences. The countryside most perfectly unites the two functions; as it is nameable, so is it morally and physically negotiable. Here, even the potentially complex *social* issue of property is a matter of knowing one's own garden from that of one's neighbour. For the peasant, the matter is decided by the continuous history of the countryside.

I dig what my father tilled; every one does the same, and all the land you see has been occupied time out of mind.

(*Émile*, p.63)

Because property is not bought here, but "goes back naturally to the right of the first occupier to the results of his work" it is "quite within the child's grasp" (*Émile*, p.63).

This brief trawl through *Emile* suggests that Rousseau's claim of producing a moral, social being flows from his linguistic theory. For where the environment can be named unequivocally, morals and law partake of its solidity. At the same time, this is also where the problems for kiddie-lit start, as the same thinking leads Rousseau to believe that text must be regarded with suspicion, even hostility.

I hate books; they only teach us to talk about things we know nothing about.

(*Émile*, p.147)

Rousseau's moral/developmental programme depends on uninterrupted reference in language; each verbal sign must be attached to a true picture of a real image. Whereas nature provides neat vocabularies of discrete objects, the book is liable to refer to things beyond the child's experience. In such a case, the word, the visual sign, is liable to usurp the object itself.<sup>10</sup>

As a general rule never substitute the symbol for the thing signified, unless it is impossible to show the thing itself; for the child's attention is so taken up with the symbol that he will forget what it signifies.

(*Émile*, p.133)

The moral force of this should be kept in mind. Rousseau's worry is not simply over efficient language acquisition, but truth and falsehood. When language loses its transparency, becomes all too material, it is a moral disaster. Having dealings with the printed word is then a matter for apology, expiation.

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<sup>10</sup>This, on the other hand is precisely what Rousseau recommends in the case of Sophie; women (i.e. sex) being a reality that one would wish to avoid altogether, a chimaeric ideal must precede the reality, such that no lesser woman will henceforth satisfy him. For "if we saw the object of our affections as it is, there would be no such thing as love". He will avoid "describing a model of perfection that could never exist", yet a model will precede the equivocally real woman and "this model, if well done, will attach him none the less to everything that resembles itself, and will give him as great a distaste for all that is unlike it as if Sophy [sic] really existed." (all above *Émile*, p.294). In a note on the above passage (Rousseau *Oeuvres Complètes*. vol.IV (Paris: Pléiade, 1969), pp.1612-1613), the editors of the Gallimard Pléiade edition of Rousseau's works make an interesting comparison with passages on love in the *Confessions*, and also the following from *La Reine Fantastique*: "la fille s'appella la Princesse Raison, nom bizarre qu'elle illustra si bien, qu'aucune femme n'osa depuis le porter".

You are an author yourself, you will reply. Yes, for my sins; and my ill deeds, which I think I have fully expiated, are no reason why others should be like me. I do not write to excuse my faults, but to prevent my readers from copying me.

(*Émile*, p.160, n.1)

With typical perversity, Rousseau gives and takes away, with the same hand, the possibility of acquiring a pure culture through print; a possibility that is, nevertheless, surely important to his democratising project. It is in direct response to this dilemma that Froebel proposes his sadly forgotten motto,

der B-all ist ein Bild des All.

(Froebel, p.32)

That is to say, the ball is an image of the all,

for the ball itself, being the representative of all objects, is the unity and union of the essential properties of all objects.

(Froebel p.53)

Using this burlesque Platonism, Froebel goes on to suggest that, for instance, the idea of a squirrel can be introduced by making the ball move in a squirrel-like manner. Thus, the child can be allowed to learn the word squirrel before it has met one in the flesh. One might conclude that Froebel is merely deranged, but this would be to miss the point. For what we see here is an attempt, however desperate, to adhere to the word of Rousseau, while at the same time creating a workable practice.

Rummaging the thoroughly artificial accoutrements of his kindergarten, the ball seems to provide the nearest approach to nature.

More significant for our present epoch is the solution proposed by F.R. Leavis in his most explicitly pedagogical work, *Culture and Environment*, written in collaboration with a schoolmaster, Denys Thompson.<sup>11</sup> Here literature is a means to an end. We cannot go back to the old ways, but its memory must be kept alive,

for the memory of the old order must be the chief incitement towards a new, if ever we are to have one.

(Leavis and Thompson, p.97)

It is on account of this belief in an organic continuity that we find F.R. Leavis, the great champion of English literary studies in this century, casting doubt on the "tendency to identify education with reading" (Leavis and Thompson, p.104). It is clear, in the organically informed regions of his thinking, that reading is a secondary pursuit, the best we can achieve in our present, reduced circumstances.

But literary education, we must not forget, is to a great extent a substitute. What we have lost is the organic community with the living culture it embodied.

(Leavis and Thompson, p.1)

It is in this sense that the rearguard action against Philistinism can quite happily incorporate a distrust of text.

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<sup>11</sup> F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1934).

And in what sense, it may be asked, were the craftsmen of *The Wheelwright's Shop* less well educated than the coal-carter of *Change in the Village*, who went to school?

(Leavis and Thompson, pp.104-5)

Implicitly, the diligent wheelwright is well educated without book-learning, in that he possesses all he needs to make sense of the immediate circumstances of his life. Happy the man who has no more words/ideas at his disposal than he has objects to which he might apply them. Any linguistic mastery beyond this fades into abstraction, whereas a simple language will teach good living. Leavis, like Rousseau, sees organic language as the safest variety. Where Rousseau remains ambivalent on the matter of "literature", however, Leavis is prepared to put his faith in a literature that will *embody* the organic; one that derives from, and reflects, it. Indeed, this is a characteristically modern solution. For given the extension of education to the whole population, not every pupil can be sent directly to Dennis Pepper's writing classes, far less to Rousseau in the forest of Montmorency. Thus, while a certain Romantic valorisation of the countryside persists, the utility of books in diffusing an organic sense must be admitted.

In this century, some such idea has frequently operated at the interface between literature and education, particularly where tradition and continuity are valued. For William Walsh, in *The Use of Imagination*, championing literary education in the formation of the mind of the child, the study of great literature is

a discipline which engages with the living growing tissue of the tradition where it is most vividly and insistently present. This is the critical study of the tradition alive in literature [...] not an ideological crusade.

(William Walsh, p.80)

Here the very growth of culture is organic; that is to say, the words are given their full etymological force. Culture thus projected is granted a special truth that puts one beyond any artificial "ideology"... For it is merely a grafting of truths as old as the land from which they grow, and the presence of the land is the very index of truth in the text. Thus Walsh can give *Huck Finn* no higher compliment than to confer on its author planthood.

The mind which conceived it and the world it represents were intimately and faithfully related, the one informed by, the other embodying, a genuine civilization of the people. A folk civilization, 'which savours thoroughly of the local soil' [...].

(William Walsh, p.16)

One can see, at any rate, that there is a broad tradition of organicism that spreads well beyond discourses that would identify themselves as paedocentric; the explicitly child-centred is only one instance, one inflection which may give way to more frank expressions of patronage. How, then, does kiddie-lit respond to this perceived need for an organicist literature?

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Let us first pursue Rousseau's notion of the countryside as the safest site for language acquisition. As well as facilitating the withdrawal of the tutor, this will introduce the child to a world that is composed of names, the preferred staple of the simple language. The narrator in one of Penelope Lively's adult novels, a historian, outlines a theory that informs Lively's own work for children.

I control the world so long as I can name it. Which is why children must chase language before they do anything else, tame the wilderness by describing it [...].<sup>12</sup>

Let me underline again that "language" here, as with the simple language, is synonymous with "nouns"; that is to say, names. Indeed, this ellipsis has already been made by the narrator who, dying of cancer, has momentarily "lost" language.

Language tethers us to the world; without it we spin like atoms. Later, I made an inventory of the room – a naming of parts: bed, chair, table, picture, vase, cupboard [...].

(Lively, *Moon Tiger*, p.41)

Sanity is thus dependent on an environment composed of discretely nameable objects. Yet in the previous quotation, note also the *sort* of names implicit; for the child, the garden/wilderness is no mere casual trope, conveniently expressing *any* disordered terrain that must be

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<sup>12</sup> Penelope Lively, *Moon Tiger* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p.51.



mastered.<sup>13</sup> The garden is indeed the place where ordinary distinctions of time – the province of the verb – are often thought to be abolished. What one is left with is the essential core of unchanging, trusty names by which the timeless, changeless countryside is known.

A particularly striking instance of elision of the verb/time in thinking about kiddie-lit is to be found in Margaret Meek's discussion of "shifters". For having praised the verb's ability to communicate subtleties of time, Meek proceeds to offer Alan Garner as a supreme practitioner of the sort of fantasy, in which "the scheme of everyday life is abandoned for another".<sup>14</sup> If such a view seems to transgress the simple language, implicating it in sequence of tense and thus the subjunctive, it is not long before we discover the organic nature of the nuance in time in which the critic is particularly interested. Garner, according to Meek,

concentrates on time as place, especially the place where his family has lived over centuries. He loops his narrative time to include layers of mythology, traditional tales, legends [etc.].

(Meek, *Signal*, 45, p.160)

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<sup>13</sup> Lively's recently published memoir of her childhood in Cairo is thus leguminously entitled *Olcander, Jacaranda* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1994). The adult Lively frequently seems to see the Cairo garden where she once played as a sort of synecdoche for her childhood, perhaps even *childhood*. This is nowhere more strikingly apparent than in an interview with a French magazine in which Lively is picked to represent the English sensibility: "J'ai aperçu le fantôme d'une petite fille dans un jardin immense, toujours solitaire ou avec les domestiques arabes et les jardiniers, dévoreuse de livres..." ('Sensibilités européennes: rencontre avec la romancière anglaise – Penelope Lively', *Marie France*, septembre 1991, pp.66-72).

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Meek, 'Speaking of Shifters', *Signal*, 45 (1984), 152-67 (p.160).

In other words, complexity of time in Garner amounts to simultaneity in an essentially unchanging organic landscape. In such a timescape, shifters notwithstanding, establishing chronology is not the point; this indeed is the view of Lively's historian narrator, Claudia, with regard to both personal and world history alike.

Chronology irritates me. There is no chronology inside my head. I am composed of a myriad Claudias who spin and mix and part like sparks of sunlight on water.

(Lively, *Moon Tiger*, p.2)

Whereas the loss of naming produces distress, the dissolution of time sequence is apparently rather agreeable. I will return to these notions of time in my final chapter. For the moment, let us note what happens in this wilderness into which time and the verb have been dissolved. For it is precisely in some version of the pastoral that the protagonists of so many kiddie-lit texts are deposited and left to find themselves. A girl in a wood in a book by Helen Cresswell is in her element and so proceeds to name its parts.

She marched on then through her new kingdom, taking it all in and bestowing names, left and right.<sup>15</sup>

Cresswell, in spite of numerous publications in the lofty-minded Puffin imprint, is not always thought of as truly serious, that is, worthy of the highest praise. John Rowe Townsend, for example, describes her as "comic" and "prolific" but confesses that he does not find the "hugely successful" Bagthorpe saga "enjoyable". The above quotation comes from

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<sup>15</sup> Helen Cresswell, *The Secret World of Polly Flint* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1983), p.54.

a book identified by Townsend as a return to "her best vein" (*Written for Children*, p.228). Indeed, it is easy to see how *The Secret World of Polly Flint*, with its timeslip narrative and rural setting (village maypoles and forests) fits pleasingly into the kiddie-lit canon, in despite of its atypicality in the work of an author who tends more towards family comedy. Polly is a child absorbed by nature.

One day the town beyond seemed to melt away and leave an empty landscape,  
fields, trees, sky.

(*Polly Flint*, p.17)

As the bestower of names, however, she is also its owner, the Queen of the forest, and naming is the deed of ownership. So when she and her time-travelling gypsy friend have to part, they leave their initials carved in an oak tree, as an enduring sign, to prove that they really were together.

"That'll stand for us both now," he told her.

(*Polly Flint*, p.175)

Here is another act of possession; this is *their* tree. Though this version of naming differs from that of Lively in that it is more poetic, so to speak, inscribing personal names rather than learning existing ones, the element of possession through naming is common to both. A review of one of Penelope Lively's children's books (*A Stitch in Time*) sees this as part of the benefit of the book to its reader.

There is much to enjoy; the pleasure in knowing names (*quercus ilex*, grass vetchling, *gryphaea*) [...].<sup>16</sup>

This "pleasure in knowing names" is not, of course, merely aesthetic. The "knowing" is at least as important as the "pleasure". It is presented in the texts, and affirmed in the corresponding crits, as an important element in the child's coming-to-knowledge of, and growing control over, the world. This much seems reasonable. Yet, time after time, the world in question seems to be the English countryside, not merely an incidental setting, but the true home of the sort of names that are to be learnt.

This is what emerges, at least, from a closer inspection of the "names" from the list offered above. There is a sort of variety in these, but it is one of novelty within a limited domain. The world of "*quercus ilex*, grass vetchling, *gryphaea*" is one whose differences are held within distinct *enclosures*, for they are, respectively, the English oak, a member of the sweet-pea genus, and a fossil. What is being named – the English countryside, plant and rock – is geographically local, taxonomically parochial, bestowing on knowledge a concrete, non-verbal primer that incites its own hermeneutic. The landscape is self-evidently *there*, a snug jigsaw of discrete objects, waiting to be named, a living lexicon. What could be more unequivocally solid and nameable than the English oak? Even the Latin tag given to it scarcely breaches proper English usage; this is just such a tag as is to be found in herbals, Edwardian ladies' sketch books and market gardens, themselves unexceptionable components of the

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<sup>16</sup> Ann Thwaite, 'Penelope Lively', in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, pp.600-2 (p.602) (first publ. in *Times Literary Supplement*, January 1976, p.885).

country life. Similarly "gryphaea", which might be seen as overly arcane, is sufficiently solid, discoverable in the landscape, to escape the charge of abstraction.

Much of this takes the form of background naming, the mere presence of nature description. More openly instructive instances are, however, to be found. This tends to take the form of folk-wisdom imparted by one character to another.

'Elm – when you crunch you feel you're getting something. Wild rose is like apples. Every schoolboy knows young hawthorn leaves.'<sup>17</sup>

The naming of the countryside, then, offers two great, interrelated virtues to the writer; the vivid presence of each object named, and their organic consonance as a whole. These may flow in and out of each other in both directions. Thus the writer may be seen as creating a whole from minute observations.

This acute sensitivity to nature and joy in the outside world is reflected in the superb background drawing of countryside, birds and animals which gives a satisfying wholeness to Rosemary Sutcliff's novels.

(Moss, 'Rosemary Sutcliff: A Love of Legend', p.18)

Or conversely she might sense the whole and allow its minutiae to emerge.

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<sup>17</sup> Lucy M. Boston, *The River at Green Knowe* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1976), p.39.

Rosemary Sutcliff's feeling for "place" is strong and, as we read, we feel the misty rain of the Lake District, taste the salty tang of the wind over the marshes and see the wide expanse of the Downs.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, both instances amount to the same thing. We know that Sutcliff's words work because they are at one with the things they name.

Curiously, what seems universal to some critics may not seem so to others. This is sometimes apparent where American critics come up against something felt to be remote by virtue of its Englishness. This by no means applies to *all* American critics; the *Horn Book* (quoted above) shows marked Anglophile tendencies, as does Alison Lurie. Other Americans, however, register a note of irritation with what seem to them specifically English modes of description. Barbara Wersba can report, of William Mayne's *It*,

only a partial enjoyment of this book. The rest vanishes into a thick English fog, and though beacons shine here and there, the total effect is obscure.<sup>19</sup>

A text by an author whose language is found transparent and natural by English or Anglophile critics "vanishes" through its parochialism. What is this "fog" that places a barrier between the text and a different language community? Wersba cites a certain contortedness in Mayne's scene-setting which has its roots in dialect. Here, one would assume, the words are not fading away to leave the thing named. It is

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<sup>18</sup> Eileen Colwell, 'Rosemary Sutcliff - Lantern Bearer', in *Horn Book Reflections*, 122-127 (p.126) (first publ. *Horn Book* June 1962).

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Wersba, 'It by William Mayne', *New York Times Book Review*, 10 December 1978, pp.85-6.

interesting, then, to note the way in which resistance to or acceptance of Englishness may focus particularly on nature description. The following two quotations are taken from reviews of Penelope Lively's *Going Back* published in American journals.

The story, with its somewhat inconclusive ending [...] is notable for the sights, sounds, and smells of a vividly realized childhood and for magnificent descriptions of the English countryside. Despite an introspective, nostalgic quality, there is great immediacy of feeling throughout the narrative.<sup>20</sup>

Many flashbacks, much unfamiliar British vocabulary (e.g., "quoit," "cockerel-feather sheen," "spinney"), lengthy descriptions of the English countryside, and limited action make this a mediocre short novel. Nostalgic adults, not young people, are the best audience for this book about remembering.<sup>21</sup>

Strikingly, these two reviews reprise almost exactly the same points, only attributing different values. Where A.A.F. finds the text's landscape description "magnificent", for Carole McIver it is merely "lengthy". Where the former has apparently peered through the veil and seen the English countryside in all its vividness and immediacy, the latter has, with palpable irritation, bumped into a collection of words taken from the esoterica of country life in another country. For, sadly, language, or at least vocabulary, is not universal. In short, the reader who has to reach for a dictionary precisely where the organic/dialect comes in is less likely to feel the unmediated breeze across the Downs.

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<sup>20</sup> A.A.F., *Horn Book*, 52 (1976), p.51.

<sup>21</sup> Carole R. McIver, *School Library Journal*, 22 (1976), p.48.

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On the other hand, it would seem equally true that, within certain geographical/class boundaries, the rural thesaurus has validity. Here we are concerned with the reader who delights in finding "quercus ilex, grass vetchling, gryphaea", and who will doubtless be shocked to see the equally delicious "quoit, cockerel-feather sheen, spinney" so summarily rejected. If one is sufficiently in love with the names, the fact that there is not much going on around them ("limited action") scarcely matters. Indeed, appearing as a list, shorn of any temporal qualification, they may be said to have attained their purest state, held together every bit as well by a certain associative contiguity as by any syntactical or narrative apparatus. To those who exist on the inside of this register, they fit together as if by magic, in spite of their marvellous variety. This variety is, of course, questionable; this is by no means a matter of the fortuitous encounter on the dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella.<sup>22</sup> A language constructed from these elements – spinney, quercus ilex, grass vetchling – knows heterogeneity no more than does the countryside itself. Indeed, it is as if the landscape of rural order had been planted, piece by piece, in the text.

The text thus greened aspires to educational value of a sort not dissimilar to that envisaged by Leavis, acting holistically through a spurious environment, rather than through academic analysis. As such it offers a complement to, and sometimes a critique of, school learning.

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<sup>22</sup>Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1992), p.206; and more especially, Foucault's use of this quotation in the introduction to his *Les Mots et les Choses*.



The latter is often the case in William Mayne. Alison Lurie notes approvingly the element of naming in Mayne's *Winter Quarters*:

The undernote of the book is semiotic: the need to name the world before it can be known.

(Lurie, 'William Mayne', p.375)

*Winter Quarters* concerns fairground people barred from their traditional wintering field. The gypsy girl Lall, nevertheless, enjoys the pastoral education. For "instead of attending school, she reads the landscape" and eventually "discovers the buried secrets of her text" ('William Mayne', p.374). Here, if Lurie is to be believed, is the education of choice; one learns to name, preferably to name *nature*. Mayne would probably agree. We find one of his children

by the fire tracing the transverse sentences of a Horatian ode down the page and finding ellipsis and caesura, dactyl and spondee. Anything, he said, but the meaning.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from the obfuscating pedantry of schoolwork, part of the problem is that Horace wrote "about places that don't exist anymore" (p.126). Nevertheless:

'It's rather nice to find things you can recognise like apple orchards damp with wandering streams. Or Lydia telephoning somebody.'

(*Earthfasts*, p.127)

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<sup>23</sup> William Mayne, *Earthfasts* (London: Red Fox, 1991), p.126.

To paraphrase; never mind all that prosody stuff, look at the countryside. For apparently all the child sees in the ode, apart from sawdust, are things he "can recognise" from his own rural existence. The tone of the above is doubtless rather wry, ending on a feeble joke, but the point remains that the child rushes straight to the name, and pins it to his own luscious surroundings.

An early Mayne text, *A Grass Rope*, sets out some of the ground rules for this cognitive science with convenient clarity. Two sisters are labelling boxes of their father's eggs for delivery.

Nan wrote the labels: Mary was not always sure which end a word began. 'All the words are different,' she said. 'They don't teach words at school, except ones you don't have, like Minim and Subtractors.' [sic]

(*A Grass Rope*, p.11)

Mary, the younger child, is thus quaintly semi-literate. The point of her malapropism does not end, however, with mere cuteness. It sparks off in Nan some linguistic musings.

'Words remind you of things,' said Nan: though she had never heard the word before, Subtractors reminded her of Algebra; and she had some to look at and do. They were easy sums, but the explanations were ridiculous and full of words that had no meaning at all:

The middle term has for its coefficient the sum of the numerical quantities (taken with the proper signs) in the second terms of the two binomial expressions [...].

(*A Grass Rope*, p.11)

Although "words that had no meaning at all" might remind us of Rousseau, the opinion thus stated is that of the child, and could be nothing more than a petulant snort at homework. However, the passage concludes:

but the sums belonging to the rigmarole could be done in your head.

(*A Grass Rope*, p.11)

Clearly the child has no problem with sums as such; it is the theory that we are to see as superfluous, a misuse of words. The same goes for geometry. Mary, to whom it appears as "lines and letters" wants to know what it *does* (p.33).

'Oh, nothing,' said Nan. 'You just learn it. But I'm good at the stuff, so I don't mind.'

(*A Grass Rope*, pp.33-4)

Nan is a capable student. Her, and Mayne's, quarrel is not with maths *per se*, but rather with abstraction, theory. Meanwhile, in counterpoint, the egg-boxes are being "labelled so that the marketer would know they came from Mr. Owland of Lew Farm" (p.10). Words of this sort have a clear purpose, and say no more nor less than they ought.

Throughout *A Grass Rope*, the calm order of the pastoral engages in a gentle conflict with the potential over-abstraction of the school. Nan and Mary represent two different stages in this dialectic. Between Nan and Adam, golden boy at the Grammar, falls the shadow of learning.

She began to feel shy of Adam again, as if he might know she had not copied her Algebra neatly, nor touched the French book to find out reflexive perfects, and not bothered her Latin book at all about second declension adjectives.

(*A Grass Rope*, p.25)

Such things are not the sum total of all possible school-work, but rather its arcana; the learning of rules surrounding learning, rather than learning itself. They are what puts the "grammar" into Grammar School, and threatens to put a barrier between the child and the simple and the organic. The younger girl, on the other hand, is not at Grammar School.

Mary had none of these things to think of. She ran ahead to see what Adam was doing now.

(*A Grass Rope*, p.25)

Even Mary, however, is soon disappointed in Adam. The riddle at the centre of the story involves an old tale about some fantastic dogs and a unicorn; Adam is trying to find the origins of the tale. Faced with Adam's cold scientific unbelief in "magic", Mary decides that she hates him.

"I thought you were nice, but you aren't."

(*A Grass Rope*, p.29)

Adam, of course, should not take this too personally, as he serves mainly as metonym for Grammar School pedantry/apostasy. His crime is to treat the story as a *mere* story, and not as a magical history. For Mary, this means no story at all.

'I don't want to go to Grammar School,' said Mary. 'It's a funny school if they don't learn about stories.'

(*A Grass Rope*, p.31)

Adam's intelligence is not entirely disdained by the text; it performs a role in the quest. Ultimately, however, it is Mary's intuition that solves the riddle, and has the last word.

'And all because I believe in fairies.'

(*A Grass Rope*, p.121)

The "all" is not quite correct; nevertheless, it is clear that mere school-learning needs the belief of the child as yet unfettered by binomials and subjunctives, at the very least as a corrective. Conversely, where Mary takes on board Adam's knowledge, it has first to be converted to her own register of naming. Adam explains echoes to the child, but she still wants to interpret this in terms of fairies.

'Echo was a nymph,' said Adam 'And that's a sort of fairy.'

Mary said 'nymph' five times, and stored it away with other names of things. 'It's like a minim,' she said. 'You can draw it and hear it, but you can't see a real one.'

(*A Grass Rope*, p.40)

Adam, wary of giving offence, is translating, and it is a just translation for Mary. For 'nymph' has the great advantage that, like egg-boxes, it can be labelled and thus stored as a discrete object, attached to the natural phenomenon of echoes. Even if it can't be seen, it can be sensed, and has a reality that algebra and physics do not have for Nan. For it belongs to the register of the pastoral, one that unproblematically groups

the mundane and the metaphysical. In its translation of knowledge into this register, kiddie-lit seeks a unified, concrete field that will *present* knowledge to the child.

If there is a distinct register of names here, in opposition to those of the Academy, the sense in which it is unproblematically "organic" or "pastoral" is perhaps not clear. For though it contains flowers and other natural entities it can also include artifacts of human involvement with nature (egg-boxes) and mythical metonymies of natural phenomena (nymphs). Their coherence as list, as register, is rooted in the thing represented, the countryside, which functions much like the plot of ground where Mary "*grew* fossils and ants and campanulas and buried dead birds" (p.13; emphasis mine).

On the social/linguistic level, on the other hand, these different elements can fly off in other directions, having varying degrees of human involvement. It would, nevertheless, seem that this is to be taken as the nearest one can approach to a natural register; text partakes of the putative objectivity of the referent. Yet, text it remains, and even the least problematic sub-category (the botanical) is precariously poised in relation to its object. Linguistics would tend, of course, to start from the word.

For the normal person every experience, real or potential, is saturated with verbalism. This explains why so many lovers of nature, for instance, do not feel that they are truly in touch with it until they have mastered the names of a great

many flowers and trees, as though the primary reality of the world were a verbal one.<sup>24</sup>

Such an account of naming is strikingly reminiscent of that of Lively or Lurie, but has a different emphasis. Here, language is a thing in itself; "as though the primary reality of the world were a verbal one". Sapir's "for instance" is particularly piquant because it re-implicates an area of knowledge frequently sought as a refuge from the anxiety of "verbalism." As such, it is very much to my purpose. Text – spoken or written – once more interposes itself between idea and object. My point, however, is not simply to offer this scruple as a counter to the organic notion of organic diction. For even some organicists betray a certain anxiety, often in the unresolved form of denial or ambivalence, over the verbal nature of their representations. It is worthwhile, then, to note various degrees of problematisation.

One *can* find instances where utterance is seen as issuing from the very soil, existing coextensively with it. Compared to the business-like adult world, that of the child is a unity of all that reaches its senses in the open field.

They could not but jar and seem artificial, these human discussions and pretences, when boon nature, reticent no more, was singing that full-throated song of hers that thrills and claims control of every fibre. The air was wine, the moist earth-smell wine, the lark's song, the wafts from the cowshed at the top of the field, the pant and smoke of a distant train – all were wine – or song, was it? or odour, this unity

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<sup>24</sup> Tom Leonard, *Intimate Voices* (Glasgow: Galloping Dog Press, 1984), p.63; attr. to Edward Sapir.

they all blent into? I had no words then to describe it, that earth-effluence of which I was so conscious; nor, indeed, have I found words since.<sup>25</sup>

Nature -- including, puzzlingly, a steam train -- "sings" and vibrates through the very fibres of being, finding the child's resonant frequency, which is that of nature itself. This song issues into another; that of the child. Being of the earth, it is beyond ordinary words, yet not beyond utterance.

The words were mere nonsense -- irresponsible babble; the tune was an improvisation, a weary, unrhythmic thing of rise and fall: and yet it seemed to me a genuine utterance, and just at the moment the one thing fitting and right and perfect.

(*The Penguin Kenneth Grahame*, p.8)

Such a song is, like Rousseau's natural language, in the realm, not of meaning, but of pure force; phonaesthesia, universally recognisable feeling. The decadent, *fin de siècle* inflection of Grahame is not, in truth, commonly found in current kiddie-lit. Yet in modern fantasy, the same phonaesthetic principle may apply to incomprehension of an alien language; one need not know the sense of the words to grasp their import.

It was a language of cold, pure sounds; a language of words harsh and sad. It brought visions of bare shining rock-shapes, of high lonely peaks, of wintry solitudes through nights of splintering cold and days of piercing light. Every word

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<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Grahame, *The Golden Age*, in *The Penguin Kenneth Grahame* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.8.



seemed to come across vast gulfs, gulfs wider than space and deeper than time; one soul speaking to another across a schism made in the very beginning of the world.<sup>26</sup>

Here, in a primitive tongue, full of primitive grandeur, the meanings of the words and the sources from which they emanate are identical; thus the schism between souls is reduced to zero. A language of this sort is itself an organic force, that flows from object to receptive object.

And the voices of the men were the dark sea, while the voices of the girls were the flying white foam; or the vast dark plain, and the silver light that ran rippling over it; or the wind-brought rumour of thunder, and the shimmering levin-light. And the drums rumbled and throbbed and passed into the ground; and the sound became the very heartbeats of the Earth herself, beating up through their feet into their blood, into their brains, into their very bones.

(Joy Chant, p.38)

Although for the happily named Joy Chant such ecstatic union is implicitly beyond us and our civilised, fallen language – in this case, one has to go to another world to find it – it is presented as a salvageable ideal. For less exuberantly fantastical authors, it would seem that it is salvageable even for us, now, in this world. After a Merlin-figure has finished speaking, it was

as if his voice still rang on. The story seemed to fit so perfectly into the green land rolling below them that it was as if they sat in the middle of the past.

(*Over Sea, Under Stone*, p.75)

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<sup>26</sup> Joy Chant, *Red Moon and Black Mountain* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1973), p.29.

Once more, there is an accord between surroundings and story, achieved in a moment of perfection and heightened awareness, that transcends the normal limitations of language. This is the sort of storytelling, oral, organic, resonant, to which kiddie-lit seems to aspire. One is lured by the ecstatically copulating analogies into forgetting that one has before one a text. Not all texts, however, are equally confident that this is possible.

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For others, Rousseauesque suspicion of text remains a problem. In William Mayne's *Gideon Ahoy!*, Dad is away at sea and for long stretches can only communicate with Mum by letter. Aside from the usual problems of a postal relationship, with which one is sympathetic, Mum has other, more metaphysical problems with her dependence on text.

Mum always took several days to recover from one of Dad's letters. 'It's the climbing out of the envelope,' she said. 'Has anything been going on while I was in there?'

(*Gideon Ahoy!*, p.48)

Here, it is not merely Dad's absence that is troublesome, but the absence of any immediate reality while text is in the ascendant. The letter is an alternative world, one in which one runs the risk of getting lost; the printed word may be antipathetic to the joys of lived experience, even though one lives in a country cottage. Mum's relation to language is also governed by the doctrine of naming. She has named her two youngest Tansy and Mercury, and has lived to regret it.

'I keep thinking they are imaginary,' she said. 'Specially when I can't remember their names, which I got out of a book and it went back to the library, so no wonder I don't remember.'

(*Gideon Ahoy!*, p.11)

Having lost their only referent – in a borrowed text – the names lose their presence – even though, curiously, tansy is the name of a flower. A close relation of Mayne's letter conceit is found in Jane Gardam's *The*

*Hollow Land*, which, as I have noted previously, owes something to Garner and Mayne.

You could see from his face that he was still inside the envelope he had just handed into the van. The two boys were just shadows passing away from him.

(*The Hollow Land*, p.80)

"He" is Mr Bateman, a journalist engrossed in the piece he has just finished writing, and posted. This, it is wryly noted, is a piece "for the newspapers about important things" (p.78). The dangers of becoming trapped between the pages of the book, seduced by print, are much in evidence here. His son Harry and his friend are mere shadows to him; the world of "real" sensory perception has been ousted by its cuckoo sibling, text.

Elsewhere, in the title episode 'The Hollow Land', Mr Bateman's elder son James is softly chastised by a canny swain for getting caught up in geology books while the living rock is all around him. For all his *study*, he cannot hear the water running beneath him in the living rock, since -- as a passing peasant points out -- he is not "*practised*" (p.53, emphasis mine). The written word may indeed prove a dangerous distraction. Rather venture into the living rock with pot-holing infants Bell and Harry (later in the same episode), and get a *real*, if hazardous, education. Once one has seen this truth, just how "important" will the "things" in Mr Bateman's article seem? They are, after all, not real things, but belong to the ghostly world of politics that recedes into the mist with every passing day in this Cumbrian paradise. When a TV presenter is coming to visit Mr Bateman, Harry is not impressed.

"Oh politics," said Harry. "They'll not notice quilts and tea pots."

"Then maybe it's time they had their attention drawn that way," said Mrs Bateman, sounding for a minute – it was happening more and more these days – like a countrywoman.

(*The Hollow Land*, p.96)

For the child pastoral – which on this occasion includes quilts and tea pots – is in direct opposition to the "adult" world of politics, and is valued above it. From its outset, in the late nineteenth century, modern kiddie-lit has tended to stress this reversal of value that takes place in the paradisiacal child world.

It was perennial matter for amazement how these Olympians would talk over our heads – during meals, for instance – of this or the other social or political inanity, under the delusion that these pale phantasms of reality were among the importances of life.

(*The Penguin* Kenneth Grahame, p.4)

Grahame first wrote the piece from which this passage is taken ('The Olympians' collected in *The Golden Age*) expressly for an adult audience in the *National Observer* (September 1891). The satirical barb is thus, perhaps, rather double-edged. Nevertheless, Grahame firmly believes in the truth of the child's union with nature, and by Gardam's time the belief is firmly embedded. The basic underlying idea is, as Fred Inglis has put it, that

the garden cherishes those strong, glad, positive qualities which were driven from the man's business world and left to the tender but passive care of the mother.

(Inglis, p.111)

Thus, in his involvement with the big world of business and politics, Mr Bateman has lost sight of the supposedly feminine, complementary qualities of magic and intuition. It must be said, however, that while Gardam seems to subscribe to this opposition, her representation of its positive term – the garden – is often less than florid. The quotation with which I started occurs in an episode, 'The Icicle Ride', in which even the spoken word may fail in its incapacity to truly convey natural wonders. One episode sends Bell and Harry out on an expedition to get some icicles. Bell, the wise nature child, comments on their failure to bring them back.

"You can't tell them about icicles. Icicles just got melted and gone [...]."

(*The Hollow Land*, p.91)

Experience, it would seem, relies on the moment and cannot be properly described. Nor does this matter.

"It's all that matters – seeing them. In fact maybe if you hadn't set out to see 'em, they wouldn't have been there. We'll never know."

(*The Hollow Land*, p.92)

Indeed – we the readers will certainly never know. The basic contradiction in this is almost too obvious to mention; how can a text rigorously assert the supremacy of experience over text without slitting its own throat? Had the "truths" laid out in the above instructions-to-read been enacted, no attempt would ever have been made to show us the icicles in print at all. As it is, the attempt that *is* made is curiously muted and statistical. Rather than the magic one is instructed to feel, the abiding

impression left is of the strain imposed by the attempt to enact a hopelessly contradictory doctrine. There were

icicles. Hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds of them. Down the shale steps of a waterfall. There were long ones and short ones and middling ones and fat ones like an arm and thin ones like a thread. They hung down from up as high as you could see and down to your very wellingtons.

(*The Hollow Land*, p.86)

Seemingly the text willingly abdicates its intricate capability of image-making such that, cleared of its more self-proclaiming tropical flourishes, it can, by simply mapping the topography of the scene, leave the veil sufficiently transparent for the true experience to shine through. The text's descriptive practice here tries to keep faith (hopelessly) with its own explicit instructions by remaining neutral. Yet the frustrated desire to *convey*, that is to move something from one place to another, to represent by something other, is all too apparent in the hyperbolic use of specious large numbers, repeated and over-produced. The itinerary of dimensions, far from enacting profusion, tends to affirm rather that an icicle is an icicle is an icicle, even if – especially if – there are hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds of them.

Indeed, the extent to which nature is represented without comment, as gratuitous description, varies greatly from episode to episode in *The Hollow Land*. Sometimes Gardam does not seem especially interested in flora and fauna for themselves. What matters is that the countryside can still be recognized as a value laden landscape. As one reviewer remarked at the time of this novel's first publication:

The aids to picturesque living it enumerates [...] all contribute to the sense of order and continuity which is part of the countryside charm.<sup>27</sup>

The bizarrely mannerist stage has been reached (as in later Garner) where the very objects – flowers, fields, mountains – from which the Romantics sought to extract values of continuity, transcendence and truth, pass uncontaminated into text only with difficulty. The text, if it follows its own indications, is left tongue-tied, unable to use the symbols necessary to textualise the rural scene it wishes to eulogise. We are told to see value in the country order, and that it is rooted in the bedrock, but we are not shown it to any great extent; a curious inversion of the usual kiddie-lit show/tell truism. A desire for unmediated value has led in such a case to a strange, eerie deforestation of the text.

Gardam has tried here to apply the commonplace kiddie-lit declaration of distaste for trope far more rigorously and conscientiously than most of her peers. Usually it is enough to state the doctrine and then get on with naming the landscape. But in this episode ('The Icicle Ride'), which takes the primacy of the evanescent moment as its theme, the need to remain faithful to her own P.R. seems to be more pressing, even than in other episodes in *The Hollow Land*. While one admires the attempted consistency, this, however, is no excuse for *dull* writing in a much-praised, Whitbread Award-winning book. One result is that the text must somehow reach beyond itself for fulfilment. The reader must bring his own bottle to this party, or else have rather a dull time. The reader who see here the joys of the country must be doing something of the sort. Indeed, wouldn't he be better to actually go outside and enjoy a

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<sup>27</sup> Patricia Craig, *Times Literary Supplement*, (1981), p.1065.



bit of that much-vaunted fresh air and nature, rather than sitting inside reading a book that, on its own terms, can neither provide a "real experience" nor even a textual experience of comparable worth?

This is all the more true of Garner's *Quartet*. For while it is widely considered as one of kiddie-lit's triumphs, and therefore, by implication, beyond the didactic, it instructs us, in the most curt fashion possible, in the inadequacy of literature. Book learning is scorned and a course in rock-reading recommended as an alternative.

"Although there was a man, him as sank this shaft, and he could read books and put a letter together. But he lost his money, for all his reading. Now if he'd read rocks instead of books, it might have been a different story, you see."

(*Quartet*, p.37-8)

Father, of course, is a reader of rocks, and indeed of the soil that gives birth to them.

Yet father had looked at the way the trees grew, and had felt the earth and the leaf-mould between his fingers, and had said they must dig here.

(*Quartet*, p.13)

This sort of idea has been taken up by other authors where they make their closest approach to Garner. Thus William Mayne tells us of the wood-carving Blemyahs, creatures of bizarre appearance who, nevertheless, talk and act rather like Garner's countryfolk.

"Fine oak," says Sire. "What's in there we'll bring out alive." He lifts his arm and listens with his ear: a Blemyah's ear is in his side and will hear what's in the

wood.<sup>28</sup>

Rather more surprisingly, Lucy M. Boston, in the last of her Green Knowe stories, takes up the theme.

'There's good stone and bad stone,' he said, 'you could say its living. Put your hand on a natural boulder warm in the sun, you can feel it's not dead, like bone for instance.'<sup>29</sup>

There are some signs of direct influence here. Boston's boy hero leaves his initials carved on a stone pillar (Boston, *Stones*, pp.23-25), thus leaving an immortal sign of his existence – the same motif runs throughout Garner's *Quartet*. To return then to Garner, Mary, who wants a book is taken by her father, the mason, into the living rock, and instructed to go into the deepest cavern.

"You come back and tell me if you want that book," said Father. "And if you do, you shall have it."

(*Quartet*, p.40)

Confronted in the cavern by the ancestral rock, bearing the handprint of her forebears, Mary's enthusiasm for the printed page duly wanes. Father hands her a stone book.

"It's better than a book you can open," said Father. "A book has only one story."

(*Quartet*, p.49)

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<sup>28</sup> William Mayne, *The Blemyah Stories* (London: Walker, 1987), pp.2-3.

<sup>29</sup> Lucy M. Boston, *The Stones of Green Knowe* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1979), p.10.

Evidently, the child is more than satisfied with this lump of fossil-bearing rock, surely the most extreme manifestation of less-is-more linguistic thinking possible. For without a single printed word, this book nevertheless contains an infinity of meaning.

And Mary sat by the fire and read the stone book that had in it all the stories of the world and the flowers of the flood.

(*Quartet*, p.51)

Given his position at the head of the kiddie-lit canon, Garner shows remarkable antipathy to "literature". If I read aright, we are bluntly told to leave books and return to the rock. Presumably this throat-slitting text is the last book one need ever read. Nor is there much else in this short quartet of inter-related novellas to distract from the central message; nothing one might identify as gratuitous description. Yet, even at this, there is enough of some obscure organic quality in these tight-lipped, instructive texts to allow them unproblematic entry into the literature of the countryside, and even a special place in it. In a sense this is quite correct, for they merely enact the usual notions with an extraordinary – even perversely heroic – purism.

## chapter four

# Redemption and Real Estate

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Snapping up a primitive country cottage for a song and doing it up as a charming weekend retreat is an English middle-class sport that is in its desperate phase. The bargains can still be found, but the urban refugee needs to be very lucky, determined or skilful.<sup>1</sup>

I have suggested that the embedding of extended metaphor in a non-fictional work gives it certain advantages, in that there is no need to state whether or not we are meant to imagine in full a *real place* which may perform, uninterrupted, the role of source of purity. Whether or not a landscape, at once real and symbolic, can transmit itself into a fictional text of a *piece* remains, thus, another question. Some such belief may be hinted at in the statutory "About the Author" blurb proclaiming the influence of the Cotswolds, South Downs or whatever on the writer, and his/her love for the landscape in which he/she lives. More fully elaborated examples, however, can be found. The inside sleeve of the paperback edition of Jill Paton Walsh's *Goldengrove* makes quite startling claims, on behalf of the author, for the influence of St Ives on the book.

What she did not realize – until she began to write *Goldengrove* and found the story obstinately refusing to be written in any but the present tense – was that Virginia Woolf had also looked out at the bay and its lighthouse. So the echoes of Virginia Woolf's writing reviewers found in *Goldengrove* seem to have their origins in the powerful influence of a particular place.<sup>2</sup>

While Walsh may be entirely sincere in this belief, and the apparent swearing off of a desirable literary forebear is not to be taken lightly, it

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<sup>1</sup> J. Fairhall, 'City Dwellers Find Country Cottage Bargains Elusive', *Guardian*, 4 February 1969 (qu. in J. Allan Patmore, *Land and Leisure* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1972), p.132).

<sup>2</sup> Jill Paton Walsh, *Goldengrove* (London: Bodley Head, 1985).

must be said that there are similarities with Woolf which tend to make one sceptical. Writing in a present time sequence need not necessarily entail a debt to Woolf. Where, however, this is used to suggest the constant succession of moments at once luminous, evanescent and habitual, the resemblance seems strong.

Now the little glasses of tonic wine, and the dish of raisins and almonds, and a radio symphony concert turned down low to go with their Grandmother's evening gossip will come next, before bed, and tomorrow.

(*Goldengrove*, p.16)

Allied with a sort of stream of consciousness method of accessing the thoughts of characters each in turn the effect is, in places, almost one of pastiche of a Woolf text such as *To the Lighthouse* or *The Waves*, affirming a perpetual present of lived experience. Similarly, although the lighthouse itself might reasonably be expected to crop up in a book about St Ives, its significance as a goal, something one must for some obscure reason visit, is particular to *To the Lighthouse*. So, when Paul has visited it without Madge, the effect is a Woolfian one of wistful regret, quietly tragic, marked by repeated exclamations.

"Madge! Madge! I've been to the lighthouse!" And a voice inside Madge that she very seldom hears, from something coiled up and hidden, deep down, wails "Too late! Too late!"

(*Goldengrove*, p.92)

Then there are the drowned men. One of these merely lies, quite plausibly, on the beach (p.100). Others, however, are credited with the

same sort of sea reveries as a Septimus Warren Smith, or a Phlebas the Phoenician.

Above the golden sand he sees the green field of the cemetery, crowded with white headstones. There lie the ancient mariners, like a landed shoal, each with a marble marker-buoy anchored above his head. They must like to lie there, within sound of the sea, he thinks.

(*Goldengrove*, p.85)

The figure of the dead, but maybe still conscious, sailor is not limited to Woolf,<sup>3</sup> but it certainly resonates throughout her work, particularly *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. So, for instance, Septimus sees himself

high on his rock, like a drowned sailor [...] I have been dead, and yet am now alive, but let me rest still [...].<sup>4</sup>

The above is but a brief survey of possible debts to Woolf in *Goldengrove*, but I suggest it is sufficient to show the extent of textual detail we are expected to see as emanating from the landscape. For Woolf and Walsh have far more than topography in common; the very fabric of the books, their preferred symbols and their mode of deployment, the very narrative practice, are shared. It is implied, then, that two authors have, quite independently, wrested the self-same truth, in its entirety, form and content, from the same *ground*. Here, the influence of the landscape, we

<sup>3</sup> cf. Dylan Thomas *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*, Under Milkwood; T.S. Eliot *Death by Water*; Hart Crane *At Melville's Tomb*. Instances more or less similar may also be found in Charlotte Mew, James Joyce etc.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Grafton, 1976), p.62.

are expected to believe, reaches a level of complexity far beyond that explicable by mere naming. It is this level – that of narrative – that I now want to address. For it is in casting a set of metaphors in a landscape presentable as real that one must take them definitively beyond their casual, disembodied use, and make them work coherently and inconspicuously.

A further note on time in *Goldengrove* is relevant here: Arguably the continuous present of narration works to produce an impression of timelessness. This is, indeed, the significance of Goldengrove, the house, itself.

That's the thing about Goldengrove, it's always the same as ever [...]. But September will be the only difference to Goldengrove, which is always the same.  
(*Goldengrove*, p.9)

This feeling is only partially lost at the end when Madge and Paul have discovered they are not cousins, but brother and sister. In *To the Lighthouse*, however, the loss is a more distinctly historical one. In its middle section, 'Time Passes', the Great War intervenes to ruin the long golden afternoon. In this respect, it demonstrates a historical sense curiously closer to modern kiddie-lit than *Goldengrove* itself, whose historical setting is somewhat unclear.<sup>5</sup> Walsh's characters have a confident belief in their private property that is not often found in contemporary kiddie-lit. They have a private beach "for the only way down to it lies over Gran's land, and so it is their very own" (p.13) and are

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<sup>5</sup> The steam train at the novels start (p.7) and allusion to Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (p.80) could place it somewhere between the 40s and 50s.



incensed when they feel they are being watched there (p.24). As will become clear, such naked affirmation of privilege is by no means characteristic of writing for children in the present instance. For massive historical events such as the Great War may be felt to have placed a barrier between us and the innocent possession of country house and garden. Spontaneous possession of a certain metaphysical property is thus compromised. To start with an extreme and atypical version of this sort of narrative of historical break, we may cite Humphrey Carpenter's conclusion to his *Secret Gardens*.

It must have been harder to dream up River Banks and Never Never Lands after the experience of the Somme.<sup>6</sup>

Carpenter's point, it should be noted is not that we cannot countenance such visions at all, but rather that we cannot construct new ones because we do not possess the real from which they spring.

We may revisit those Enchanted Places ourselves, but we cannot create new ones.  
(Carpenter, p.222)

According to this account, the First World War and the ensuing social upheaval destroy the world in which the Enchanted Place is credible, in which it is a *real* fantasy. Thus we may experience it at a remove, but we cannot live it; we can read it, but we cannot write it. In some ways, of course, this is quite a commonplace argument; kiddie-lit is just another plausible addition to the *cultural* death toll in Flanders. We

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<sup>6</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), p.210.

*all know*, of course, that the world lost its innocence in the trenches. So, according to Carpenter, it goes with kiddie-lit also; the Golden Age encounters a fall, and a more sober Silver Age ensues.

Within the field of kiddie-lit criticism, however, this is not quite the usual story. In the mid-fifties, a second Golden Age is supposed to have taken place. For Carpenter, the Second Golden Age has been a non-event. This is a position hardly calculated to endear him to Pearce, Mayne, Garner, Lively et al.<sup>7</sup> Yet it is arguably founded on precisely the same historical narrative that has shaped the course of the garden in their own works.

Like many critics, Carpenter takes Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* as a critical moment in the development of kiddie-lit. Where he differs from most contemporary *aficionados* of kiddie-lit is on the question of value. For, whereas for the writers of the fifties onwards it is one of their most important landmarks, a cardinal point from which all other differences are plotted, Carpenter sees *The Secret Garden* as the beginning of the end – a too-schematic, second-hand topography, a beautiful idyll fallen into the hands of a maladroit hack. He seems positively affronted that

Mrs. Burnett of all people has brought us to the centre of Arcadia [...].

(Carpenter, p.189)

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7 Especially given the desultory nature of Carpenter's own, decidedly Lead Age, *Mr Majeika* books, recently fleshed forth on television in the person of Stanley Baxter.

Why is it that "of all people" is inserted to turn the highest compliment into recrimination? Seemingly, it is the very precision with which Burnett has mapped the late Victorian Arcadia that rankles. This she has reproduced faithfully, yet does not "understand" (p.189) or "comprehend" (p.190), for

having picked it up in her hand, [she] is scarcely sure what she is holding.

(Carpenter, p.190)

Poor Mrs Burnett is accused of dealing in stolen goods; she is a fence rather than an author. Nevertheless, she has picked up a whole thing, an accomplished, coherent landscape. In most other contemporary criticism the same compliment is paid unconditionally. For its proponents, the beauty of *The Secret Garden* lies in the dexterity with which it roots a metaphysical, utopian abolition of the divisions of work and play, society and nature, in a graspable reality. The incontrovertible concreteness of plants and trees, rooted in a full, holistic terrain, assures the concreteness of the values attached. Object and symbol alike can be shown to co-exist in the self-same *natural* landscape. For many, including Fred Inglis, *The Secret Garden*, more than any other text, maps the landscape of value onto the soil.

The great strength of this book is the life it gives to these moving commonplaces. Mrs Burnett starts from the positives of Romanticism and goes on to turn these positives into solid details [...].

(Inglis, p.113)

In other words, the quest for a simple/organic language has found its goal. Organic rhetoric, when thus fictionalised, need no longer worry

that it might be another free-floating metaphor, a dubious abstraction lacking positive reference. The worrying over reference that is a central thread of continuity in linguistic theory from Rousseau, through Saussure, to Derrida, is, for the latter-day Rousseauist, abolished by tying each signifier to its materialised signified, much as nursery gardeners label their wares.

There is, unfortunately, something rather infelicitous, doomed even, in an enterprise that seeks to locate the metaphysical in real estate. No sooner has one secured the advantages of solidity (emphasis on *real*), than the *estate* takes a hammering from the market and changes its (social, historical, contingent) reality. Here, indeed, is where the 1914 war makes its entrance. For the Victorian house and garden ensemble is no longer an unproblematic social reality. It flourished for a while,

only to be destroyed by the machine guns on the Somme and their sequel in the late 1920's in the Bauhaus at Dessau.<sup>8</sup>

The above quotation is taken from a book devoted to the possibility of reappraising the Lutyens dream house, with a view to making it part of our present once more. Apparently the experiments of Modernism have failed, and we have been

turning back to a more vernacular style which more readily fits into the countryside or cityscape.

(Gradidge, p.xvi)

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<sup>8</sup> Roderick Gradidge, *Dream Houses: The Edwardian Ideal* (London: Constable, 1980), p.xvii.

In the context of architecture, "vernacular" often means something like rustic, organic, rough and ready; an association exactly parallel to that of simple and organic in kiddie-lit. Our whole environment is to be recast in a way that will turn back the tide of the twentieth century to rediscover an apparently lost moment. Redemption will follow loss. Kiddie-lit, rather than rolling over and dying in the trenches that herald the Modern world, as Carpenter suggests, has sought for a similar regeneration.

This has been no easy task; for kiddie-lit does not, to its credit, merely shrug off the half-century that separates it from its Edwardian antecedents. The immediacy of landscape is still felt to be necessary if text is to be a truly transparent simulacrum of it, but the difficulty of the task is to be measured in terms of distance from the pre-Great War world, the world that gave suck, for instance, to Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

The fine evocation of Sussex in *Puck* can remain unforced because it is directly experienced. Rosemary Sutcliff has to recreate a landscape which, except for odd corners of the National Parks [...] is now irreversibly altered [...].

(Inglis, p.218)

In other words, Sutcliff has a job on her hands, but it must be done. Looking back to the last secure point in a certain history may be the very stimulus to create. In her introduction to *The Complete Borrowers Stories* (written in the form of an answer to a child's enquiries) Mary Norton looks back to her own childhood invention of little people. Just as they were disappearing from her own child-life, squeezed out by the

"maturing demands of boarding-school"<sup>9</sup>, the Great War was raging, though at the time ghost stories were more frightening.

Life perhaps in those days seemed a little too secure – in spite of the 1914-18 war and the mud and the blood across the Channel which engaged our elder brothers, but which to us, at our convent school, seemed wearily familiar yet somehow not quite real.

(Mary Norton, p.6)

The world, nevertheless was changing. Recognizing this as an adult, the author returns to her childhood fancy.

It was only just before the 1940 war, when a change was creeping over the world as we had known it, that one thought again about the Borrowers.

(Mary Norton, p.6)

The reason given is that people were living Borrower-like existences through harsh economic necessity. Equally, however, Mrs May's framing narrative at the start of *The Borrowers* suggests that the Borrower existence is in downturn, suffering from social trends.

'Nowadays, I suppose,' Mrs May went on slowly, 'if they exist at all, you would find them in houses which are old and quiet and deep in the country – and where the human beings live to a routine. Routine is their safeguard: it is important for them to know which rooms are to be used and when. They do not stay long where there are careless people, unruly children, or certain household pets.'

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Norton, *The Complete Borrowers Stories* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1983), p.5. The first of the books collected in this volume is *The Borrowers* (London: Dent, 1952).

(Mary Norton, p.13)

The little people are not, according to this account, perfect analogues for the thrifty poor of the inter-war years, in as far as they are still dependent on a passing order, rather than the product of the one that comes to replace it. For the above is a description of the well-ordered machine that was the Victorian country house. Now one would have to go a long way, perhaps to the very heart of the countryside, to find it.

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Whether due to the Great War, or the disappearance of the old country order, or a combination of the two, a historical change is seen to have taken place that puts us at a remove from the era of *The Secret Garden*. Norton's *Borrowers* are one important response to this, charmingly delineating a residual place, found only deep in the countryside, and a life built from left-overs and scraps. Most important of all, however, is *Tom's Midnight Garden*, sometimes credited with resurrecting children's literature. For it takes on *The Secret Garden* directly, on its own territory.

Only forty years later, Philippa Pearce wrote her great threnody, *Tom's Midnight Garden*, over that same vision. But Mrs Pearce [...] has the benefit of knowing what happened to some of the Edwardian visions, and how they died. Mrs Burnett's fine book speaks with an optimism which it is notoriously difficult to recover.

(Inglis, p.113)

Thus Inglis reiterates the Carpenter notion of a fall, but sees sufficient literary value in the *Secret Garden* tradition to argue for redemption. The difficulty of Pearce's historical position is clear, but in what way can it be seen as a "benefit"? Surely the parcelling out of a once whole landscape, not to mention the disappearance of an audience who could be confidently expected to at home in country houses sounds the death knell of the Burnett vision?

Naomi Lewis, introducing *The Wind in the Willows*, also echoes Carpenter's notion of a tranquil pre-war community in which the mystic pastoral could appear real. She differs in as far as she, like Inglis,



recognizes some benefit in the subsequent destruction of this alleged state of grace, in as far as it lends an already nostalgic text, in a nostalgic genre, an intensified poignancy.

Its potent English pastoral dream remains unchanged. The earliest readers in 1908 and onwards must have thought this permanence true of Edwardian life itself. History was soon to give the book a further asset, nostalgia.

(Grahame, p.xii)

Lewis posits the absence, or difficulty of recovery, of a reality as an "asset"; an intensification of the economy of value, rather than its destruction. The point thus made about reading could, for Inglis at least, be extended to writing. It is the relation in time between the gardens of Burnett and Pearce that provides the most striking insight into their value in writing for children since the fifties.

For this nostalgia, far from hindering further production, as Carpenter argues, is both the great muse and the central anxiety of the Second Golden Age of kiddie-lit. *Tom's Midnight Garden* introduces the time-slip narrative, which has since come to play a central role in serious kiddie-lit, precisely so that it can tackle the loss of the garden; "tackle" in the sense that it can at once be lamented as absent, and yet, at least partially, present for celebration in the text. In the literal present, the house, shorn of its garden by the encroachment of the city, is the island of Tom's 'Exile' (the title of the first chapter).

The house was crowded round with newer, smaller houses that beat up to its very confines in a broken sea of bay-windows and gable-ends and pinnacles. It was the only big house among them: oblong, plain, grave.<sup>10</sup>

In this dismal setting, Tom must stay with his Aunt and Uncle in isolation from his measles-ridden brother, robbed even of the small, town garden at his parent's house, where they would have "joyously" (p.7) spent their Summer holidays. The notion of imprisonment in his new environment is reinforced by Tom's horror at the bars across his bedroom window (p.12). When an old grandfather clock strikes thirteen, however, a quite different landscape opens up.

He was in an orchard, that also served for the keeping of hens, the pegging out of washing and the kindling of a bonfire. Beyond the orchard were meadows and trees, from among which rose the roofs of what must be a village.

(*Tom's Midnight Garden*, p.54)

Here, in what later turns out to be the Victorian past of the house, Tom finds a bolt-hole from his imprisonment in island exile. At midnight, the house is no longer (anachronism intended) hemmed in by the city. It is no exaggeration to claim that Pearce's theme is the metaphysical presence of absent landscapes. Nevertheless, the proposition is put to us elegantly in the apparent continuous present of the story. Thus, when Tom eventually discovers that old Mrs Bartholomew and his child-friend Hatty are one and the same, time sequence is momentarily knocked off balance;

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<sup>10</sup> Philippa Pearce, *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1976), p.10 (first publ. by the Oxford University Press, 1958).

'You were Hatty – you *are* Hatty! You're really *Hatty*!'

(*Tom's Midnight Garden*, p.209)

So the present reasserts itself, with double emphasis, forging a link with the past. Indeed, according to Pearce herself, as reported by John Rowe Townsend, the story arose out of her own experience in quarantine with TB, dreaming of her childhood home. The dislocation is geographical as much as temporal, yet, again, absence is the precise impetus to dream and thus to story.

Imprisoned in hospital, I went there in my imagination as I had never done before – as I had never needed to do, of course.

(*A Sense of Story*, p.169)

We know, however, that her loss of this house is temporary, rather than temporal and absolute. For as the publisher's blurb in the edition of *Tom* already cited tells us, she "was born and brought up in the Cambridgeshire village where she now lives". It is interesting that, in taking form as a novel for children, this very personal sense of loss or distance is dramatised as the loss of a way of life that had ended before Pearce was born. The break-up of the family of the house at the close of the Victorian age means the collapse of the family business and the break-up of the family house.

'Barty and I came over for the auction. The house already looked very different by then. James had been short of money, and so he'd sold first the two meadows, and then the orchard, and then even the garden. The garden had quite gone, and they

were building houses at what had been the bottom of it, with their garden strips where the yew trees had been.'

(*Tom's Midnight Garden*, p.213)

Mrs Bartholomew's husband buys the house, but makes flats out of it as it is no longer "a gentleman's house any more, with no garden to it" (p.214). Her own children subsequently die at the Somme (p.214). Pearce, in fact, shows an acute awareness of all the reasons why she is not supposed to be able to reaccess the age of Burnett, which is nevertheless what she is trying to do. For whatever personal garden she may be looking to repossess, Pearce clearly also wants to redeem the Burnett vision. So close is the presentation of Tom's garden to that of Mary Lennox, both in spirit and in detail, that the textual origins of this aspect of the book are hard to avoid. Tom finds the same irascible old gardeners, robins and little girls of Burnett's late-Victorian/Edwardian idyll. Without doubting for an instant the sincerity of Pearce's account of her personal inspiration, it must be added that her choice of framing narrative implicates her personal investment in the intertext of the *Secret Garden*. For Pearce, as for many who follow, the loss of house and garden, and/or the countryside/nature, as represented by the *literary* example of *The Secret Garden*, is the very type of loss, and one that must be re-presented in the most simple, credible terms possible.

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The history of the Garden since *The Secret Garden* is made up of such re-negotiations of symbol with social reality. In 1911, it is assumed, a homogeneous English middle-class audience allows the Garden and House to appear self-evidently present. Existing concrete terrain fits perfectly over its ideological counterpart, allowing value to emanate spontaneously. Whether or not such a metaphysical confidence was ever justified, it is certainly what Carpenter, Naomi Lewis, Pearce et al. believe, in some way, to have been lost along with the old familiar landscape of house and garden. As the social reality becomes less assured, as the old house is turned into flats and the garden built over, and an increasingly urbanised audience is addressed, this terrain has to be re-negotiated into the text, in deference to the assumed reality of the reader. It returns from the past, or the child has to go into the past to find it. Or it has to be found in a municipal park or the countryside. For writers of kiddie-lit in the present instance are, in spite of their reported liberation by imagination from the shackles of brute reason. A Never Land that exists, but out of reach of everyday experience is of no interest to them. According to Ariel Dorfman, *à propos de* Babar the elephant's jungle principality,

it is innocence, the basic substratum upon which this space is constructed, that allows fantasy and reality to be reconciled without doubts or schisms.<sup>11</sup>

In this instance, Dorfman is probably right to suggest, mere nostalgia acts as a sort of glue; he is certainly right to point out that some such reconciliation is desirable for kiddie-lit. Babar, however, being

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<sup>11</sup> Ariel Dorfman, *The Empire's Old Clothes* (London: Pluto, 1983), p.44.

fantasy for small children and in picture-book form, can afford some leeway in matters of time, place and character. The British version since Philippa Pearce, being to all intents and purposes novelistic, has worked harder than this to justify itself. The acclaimed writers for the eight to twelves of this period have tended in practice not to rely too heavily on the ready anthropomorphism and thirst for *unlimited* magic of the child. Rather, there is a feeling that fantasy must be kept within the bounds of a rigorous reality, combining the simple, organic language with an immediacy of apprehension.

A novel for children should, in my view, 'work' at surface level; and *Tom's Midnight Garden* does.

(Townsend, *A Sense of Story*, p.168)

Townsend has a notion of realism which it will be worthwhile to worry over a little here, though I will discuss it more fully in my final chapter. As we have already noted, Pearce was originally inspired to regain a lost place through an act of imagination. As in the case of Jill Paton Walsh's *Goldengrove*, however, this is an imagination that springs from, and owes a debt to, a concrete reality, whether actually present, or long gone. According to Townsend, "realism" demands that "the setting is the present rather than the historical past" (*Written for Children*, p.246). Yet, the period works of Gillian Avery can be discussed under this heading, for though they

are set in the late Victorian period, [...] they are not explorations of the past. Miss Avery has simply moved the present back a little; the action of her stories is undoubtedly happening 'now', but 'now' is not quite in its usual place.

(*Written for Children*, p.246)

No-one who has read, for instance, *The Greatest Gresham*<sup>12</sup> could seriously dispute the influence of E. Nesbit and her period. Why, then, does the critic want to drag this period into some virtual present? Indeed we may note here an idea not so much of *the present*, as of *presence*, which is a necessary component of this form of realism. The same criteria apply to *Tom's Midnight Garden*, which straddles past and present, but is suffused throughout with presence.

Let us return with redoubled attention, then, to the importance of the "surface level" of the novel's operation. This notion of realism is not out of keeping with Pearce's own thinking. When Tom first investigates the time-slipped garden, he is keen to establish its reality. Discovering that his fingers pass through the latch of a garden door, he remarks nevertheless that it "looked as real as any latch he had ever seen anywhere" (*Tom*, p.52). When he has finally pushed his way through the door, and explores the garden and its environs, he finds nothing more surprising than – nature.

The only surprise there was the boundary: a river, clear gentle-flowing, shallow, and green with reeds and water-plants.

The garden and its surroundings, then, were not, in themselves, outside the natural order of things; nor was Tom alarmed by his own unnatural abilities.

(*Tom's Midnight Garden*, p.55)

As it turns out, it is Tom himself who is the improbability, the "ghost"; he has merely entered another time which is still there, and in

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<sup>12</sup> Gillian Avery, *The Greatest Gresham* (London: Armada Lions, 1972).

which everything works according to nature. Indeed, the past landscape, replete with nature since departed, comes to seem more present than stale modernity. It is in this notion of realism – in presenting a nameable, organically whole landscape – that kiddie-lit seeks to ground its more improbable flights, such as timeslips. For this is a reality that is maybe not in the present, but is nevertheless shown to be *present*.

The device is a clever one and has been influential. Yet this very cleverness tacitly implicates the concessions one has to make to regain the garden. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, as we will see, is not entirely taken as a blueprint by its successors. It shares with them, however, a partially successful attempt to realistically ground the resurgence of a past organic order. It is in attempting to validate the presence of metaphysical value in a site freed of the contradictions of capitalistic production (financial purity) that these writers impose upon themselves a remarkably strict awareness of changes in the market. Concurrently, it is in their search for the metaphor that is not metaphor (organic linguistic purity) that metaphor must manage itself more ingeniously, drafting in other tropes (e.g. the time-slip) to rescue it. These, in turn, must be naturalised. Enormous, heroic effort is poured into the attempt to abolish these contradictions, which indeed are the preconditions for the "realistic fantasy", only to reinstate them. Later, I will return to the distinct elements of the fantastic or supernatural that tend to make problems for realism, but for the moment it is enough to notice the role of the organic in its maintenance.

In spite of, or perhaps partly because of, this constant need for adaptation, the garden is impressively perennial, evergreen. Seemingly it is so essential to the subsistence of the child-image, that it will drag its



*inamorati* through hedge and ditch before its loosens its hold. This is nowhere more apparent than in kiddie-lit's occasional troubled attempts to deal openly with the social, and with economic and cultural class in particular. Let us take an extreme example, that of John Rowe Townsend's *Noah's Castle*, in which the writer/critic eschews the timeslip and attempts what is rarely attempted in kiddie-lit; to represent economic crisis and its disruption of family. The walled garden is explicitly seen here by Townsend as bourgeois, exclusive, a relic which present economic circumstance and social history can scarce afford. In the face of famine and social unrest, Mr Mortimer buys the house of kiddie-lit's dreams, on the edge of town.

The Mount is a high, leafy suburb where rich merchants and manufacturers lived in Victorian times. Nowadays they've mostly sold out, and those who are still in business live many miles away, in deep country.<sup>13</sup>

Class is explicitly measured here by how far one can retreat into some version of the pastoral. The house, *Rose Grove*, offers, in comparison to deep country, only partial refuge from the city. Thus the traffic is still audible,

but it was as if somebody had tried to make it as remote as a limited amount of space allowed.

(*Noah's Castle*, p.9)

Even this qualified privilege, the urban pastoral, has its cost;

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<sup>13</sup> John Rowe Townsend, *Noah's Castle* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p.9.

'Five times what it would have done a year or two ago.'

(*Noah's Castle*, p.12)

Nor, indeed, is the remarkably close attention that Townsend pays to the market an incidental feature. The latent elitism, protectionism of this whole landscape is emphasised, and is ultimately presented as its own downfall. It is suggested that it should be replaced by a "Share Alike" democracy; a homely, liberal socialism. Mr Mortimer has tried, increasingly against his family's wishes, to hoard food, but in the end, the food has been looted, the family is in tatters over the morality of the Father's selfish stand, and the "privacy" of house and family alike – i.e. home – has been shattered. Thus far, *Noah's Castle* is a successful revision of the promised land of the child-world, all the more effective in that it takes on certain discourses on their home ground. The act of buying into house and garden is pointedly presented as just that; an investment, economically contingent, a social act.

If, however, the garden is no escape as such, the child is nevertheless returned to its municipal counterpart, the public park, in the end. A good/bad garden opposition is thus set up, mapped out on a concrete terrain according to ideological boundaries; the park is acceptable because it can be assimilated into the "Share Alike" ethos. It has a place on the map and a function therein separate from the walled garden. That this is the sort of opposition intended is clear from another garden at the end of the book. The protagonist, Barry, visits his less well-off friend Wendy whom he has helped through the crisis. He finds her in her "tiny front garden".

'Flowers! I'd have thought in these times it would be vegetables. Aren't flowers a bit of a luxury?'

'Yes. But today I just had a feeling as if they were a necessity.'

(*Noah's Castle*, p.180)

The dialogue shows the strain of the didactic, schematic intent. An apology is registered, but the flowers *are* a necessity: the *text* needs them. Furthermore, it is the child of lower class who has registered this need, deflecting the charge of profligacy, superfluity. On the way to the Centre, which is working to help people out of the crisis, the two friends then take a walk through the park. It is looking "uncared-for" because the council have not been able to afford staff. Miraculously, however, its value is intact, seemingly beyond the reach of such petty fluctuations in the fortunes of man.

In the meantime one realized that Nature [*sic*] could do quite a lot without municipal aid. Like everywhere else that hadn't been covered with concrete, the park was alive with new season's green.

(*Noah's Castle*, p.181)

For, naturally, it is spring, where all good children's books end, or at least those of Townsend. Thus also in his *Gumble's Yard*, nature benevolently keeps its promise of annual rebirth for all, regardless of class and milieu.

Summer was coming, the blades of grass were showing between the stone setts, and soon the weeds would blossom on the empty sites.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> John Rowe Townsend, *Gumble's Yard*, rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1985), pp.127-8.

Suddenly we are back in the Garden again: spontaneous, eternally reborn, beyond the reach of man's paltry tamperings. In *Noah's Castle*, this is a resolution that keeps one foot in a critique of house and garden, and another in thoroughly traditional kiddie-lit organicism. Apparently the ending requires a return to the Garden proper. The child can be let out of its pen for a bit of serious social criticism but only on the condition that it is returned safely to its box in the end. For, how silly society is; if only it worked like Nature.

Indeed, in 1975, when *Noah's Castle* was published, the old house and garden ensemble was already falling out of favour as the garden myth of choice. This is what one notices in other books of the seventies that try to accommodate a social dimension into the traditional landscape. Rather, a move to the country is favoured. Townsend's aside that the real bourgeoisie have now "sold out, and those who are still in business live many miles away, in deep country" (*Noah's Castle*, p.9), where they will find different benefits and different drawbacks, is true also of the heroes of kiddie-lit.

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The run of kiddie-lit authors, not as troubled as Townsend by working-class roots, but nevertheless no longer resident in their grandparents' country houses, have found other routes back into the garden. A move to the real, rustic country has increasingly seemed like the ideal solution. For here, in a modest country cottage, the element of social privilege that has come to seem so anachronistic in the case of the garden, is perhaps not so apparent. One might expect nature, in the raw, or at least cultivated after the time-honoured fashion, in co-operation with its own laws, to provide the possibility of a setting purged of the evils of man and money. As with the garden proper, however, the contradictions in this manoeuvre are not merely pushed aside by kiddie-lit. Rather, once more, they are re-incorporated into the text, in a manner consistent with the "realistic" approach as outlined above. Indeed, the present reality of the countryside provides the very battle-ground on which an antagonism between organicism and industry is being fought; a narrative of struggle dear to the heart of kiddie-lit. Here is a truly grand narrative, one that over-arches even that of the Great War. Those who fly to the country might be expected to find there nothing but the promised tranquillity. Certainly the Leavisite tradition seems to suggest immersion in an undisturbed representation of continuity. We live in

a mechanistic society which, although through and through naturalistic in belief, yet reduces the natural universe to fractional and peripheral attention, which huddles the organic away behind the fabricated and which drowns out the rhythms of nature with the jerkings of the combustion engine.

(William Walsh, p.44)

So we might take this as a call for the revelation of the underlying naturalism of our culture in its proper field, and this might be done by removing the jerkings that cloud our peace. For there is a tendency here to see all human/industrial changes to the world as a malign encrustation on top of an original, pure landscape. Through naming, as has already been suggested, one might enter into a reciprocal relationship with the land wherein one possesses and is possessed. Indeed there is a contemplative element to organicist kiddie-lit narratives that involves one in finding points where "Time and Forever mingle"<sup>15</sup> in untouched spots. The game is one familiar from other writings informed by organic sentiment. Thus W.G. Hoskins, for example, can be found in a lonely place "dissolving all the irrelevant human details of the scene".<sup>16</sup> What is thus exercised is not so much the pathetic fallacy as an active restructuring of the field of vision in search of an ideal.

We are seeing the natural world through the eyes of men who died three or four thousand years ago, and for a moment or two we succeed in entering the minds of the dead.

(Hoskins, p.17)

This very activity is conducive to a certain form of liberty, familiar in kiddie-lit.

The imagination is liberated over the scene.

(Hoskins, p.17)

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Garner, *The Moon of Gomerath* (London: Lions, 1972), p.86.

<sup>16</sup> W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1955), p.17.

Setting the scene at the outset of the story will often mean precisely finding a spot apt to such regression therapy and recounting the season's particulars.

There were hazel nuts green and fast in their leafy cups in Haw Bank, the wood below Gareborough. The nuts were still bitter with unripe milk, Blackberries hung on their barbed vines at the edge of the wood, and the warm weather bruised them into ripeness. Their readiness comes from the surrounding air, but the ripeness of nuts springs from the root of the tree.

(Mayne, *Earthfasts*, p.7)

This information can then be picked up later to provide us with notes on dialect and nature, unified under the crucial aspect of naming.

'That's not ready. Them's not brown-leemers.'

Brown-leemers are ripe nuts, ready to slip shining from their leafy holder and be cracked smartly and be mellow on the tongue.

(*Earthfasts*, pp.28-9)

Similarly, the story will often end, as I have already suggested in the case of *Noah's Castle*, with some meditation on nature. *Earthfasts* gives the last words to a farmer only half-regretting that his boggart (household spirit) has gone to rest.

'It's just as well,' said Frank. 'It would wash the eggs, but it turned every one[...].'

(*Earthfasts*, p.220)

Lightly, normality, in the form of farming – an industry, but a “natural” one – is returned. Sometimes there is a more ecstatic reunion. The child walks into a picture of renewal, signalling the end that is only a beginning.

He looked at the branches near his head and saw suddenly that the new leaves were already there, sharp folded shapes, shiny brown tips of beech and chestnut and elm.

(Lively, *Thomas Kempe*, p.158)

It is autumn, for “the old leaves fell silently around him”, yet “above them the branches held up the new ones, furled and waiting for the spring” (*Thomas Kempe*, pp.158-9). For, as I have already note, it is always virtually spring when a child finds itself alone with the land at last, even when factually, as below, the month is identified as August.

And I go flying and leaping down Hartley Birket and over the wall into the Home Field. And here's Light Trees looking at me with its old and smiling face, quiet and untroubled in the green fell side.

(Gardam, *The Hollow Land*, p.152)

The visionary aspect of this sort of revelation, carried to its conclusion, may take the form of a dream, a hope for the future in spite of the beastly threats undergone in a struggle against nuclear dumping.

In my dream I walked over the earth and it was mostly green. I saw clear skies with birds, and fish in crystal waters, and though I met many different sorts of



people, they were all my sisters and my brothers. I had to wake up, of course, but that's not the end of it. It never is when I dream.<sup>17</sup>

Pure uninterrupted naming, therefore, plays a part in the stories of the ruralist diaspora. Yet a novel does not generally take the form of a catalogue of flowers and trees, or of anything else for that matter. It must have some form of drama, and there is no shortage of drama in organicist fiction. The constant battle between city/industry and countryside is etched onto the fabric of these texts as much as on the terrain described. The contemplative moments shown above are the still points in a narrative, the setting forth of a scene that extends before and after the action, if not unchanged, then at least self-regenerating. The action itself, however, can hardly be made up entirely of nature ramble and meditation. Historical and deeply felt environmental considerations, then, are joined by strong formal reasons why the rural scene must be dramatised not as entirely unchanging, but as being in constant conflict with antipathetic forces. Possession of the organic has to be earned. Alongside, and perhaps converging with, the personal tribulations of the plot, runs a drama of resistance to the filth of modernity. As one might expect, industrialism's dirtier habits figure largely here. The drama may be an understated one of juxtaposition.

The great highway was a wound of barren cement through the green, lush pastures.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Swindells, *A Serpent's Tooth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p.136.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Dickinson, *The Weathermonger* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1970), p.81.

In the concrete juxtaposition of natural and artificial referred to is seen a symbolic meeting of health and disease/violence. Such brief glimpses into a massacre in progress are not uncommon. The note sounded is often one of disgust.

The common was encircled by a broken rash of houses, such as may be seen, like a ring of pink scum, on the outskirts of most of our towns and villages today.<sup>19</sup>

The inclusive "our" begs the question – who is responsible? – but leaves it unanswered, the gap being filled by the very virulence of Garner's revolt. This righteous position becomes more difficult to sustain when some element of personal responsibility is avowed.

It was good to be up and away on the fell. But the turf of the green-road was slashed and rutted by the other shepherds' scramblers, and the explosions of his own engine blatted back from the stone walls, spoiling the peace. Everything was getting spoilt these days. He looked down on the village, tight huddle of grey houses that had stood so right for so long. But spoilt by these shiny metal barns and silos; the straggle of new red-brick bungalows leading nowhere.<sup>20</sup>

We already know that "Ralph distrusted, hated, all machinery. But he had to use the scrambler" (p.7). What it is that compels him to use this monstrous device is unclear, just as it is unclear how everything is, impersonally, "getting spoilt" (emphasis mine). Ralph is at once implicated and absolved. There, in short, is the contradiction of this whole manoeuvre, one that is only ultimately resolved by assuring us that

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<sup>19</sup> Alan Garner, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (London: Lions, 1971), pp.80-1.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Westall, *Urn Burial* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p.7.

renewal is on the way. For after intense action involving aliens and the M.O.D., Ralph climbs the fell once more with his new found friend Ruby – this being a “teen” book.

Above, they climbed the slicing gullies that marked the battle. The sharp edges were crumbling; water was doing its work. Here and there, something green was sprouting out of the black peat. By next summer, the wounds would be healed.

(*Urn Burial*, p.157)

Thus in the case of *Urn Burial*, there is a clear dynamic relation between the frenetic, hi-tech sci-fi action and the antique land it finds at the outset and leaves in its wake. The conflict is exciting and manages to engage a sci-fi audience while nevertheless securing the ultimate triumph of nature in the still point of closure. In this way, the disturbance and conflict necessary to story, and indeed the excitement of violence, are recombined with the transcendent, poetic if you will, appeal to eternity. To do its work, the text needs machinery, every bit as much as Ralph needs it to do his. This narrative dependence may not always be so clear, yet the same conflict informs most current organicist texts.

The above examples may be said to represent dirt so as to make clean spots shine all the brighter. Yet the enemies of the organic way, against whom literature militates, are not industrial merely in the sense of being dirty and generally aesthetically displeasing. Transport and telecommunications, the whole apparatus of the infrastructure and bureaucracy, are also frequently invoked in lists that leave the connections, to a greater or lesser extent, to be made by the reader – a sort of anti-naming. Where Leavis makes his opposition between literature

and the post-industrial most plainly, this aspect of technology is foregrounded.

Relics of the old order are still to be found in remote parts of the country, such as the Yorkshire dales, where motor-coaches, wireless, cinema and education are rapidly destroying them [...].

(Leavis and Thompson, p.2)

Even education – bad education one understands – can be part of this process of automation; only in residual pockets may one avoid it. For it is not at all out of place in a list whose elements share, if nothing else, the function of spreading information, and aiding migration. The argument, then, is not ecological in the sense of wishing to preserve nature, so much as environmental, in the sense of deploring the new networks through which one arrives at a more diffuse understanding of one's world. Such a notion has been put into the mouths of babes since the early days of modern kiddie-lit. In this, as in much else, E. Nesbit (writing here in 1907) can be seen as a sort of pioneer.

'I think magic went out when people began to have steam-engines,' Jimmy insisted, 'and newspapers, and telephones and wireless telegraphing.'<sup>21</sup>

Notice once more that "steam-engines", thus coordinated with communication technology, are not so much guilty of creating filth as of changing and extending the topography of the knowable world, thus diminishing mystery. Recent criticism would heartily agree with Jimmy. By following the supposed oral/fairy tale tradition, and avoiding

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<sup>21</sup> E. Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1979), p.20.

didacticism, one aligns oneself with precisely this magic, and this is the proper task of writers for children.

By making magic they are keeping some hold on what is more actual than the hard world of "telegrams, anger, wire-tapping, war, death, and taxes".

(McWilliam, 'Trust Hansel and Gretel', p.17)

Paradoxically, the disappearance of magic and the landscape and life that nurtures it, though apparently constrained by massive and hideously unstoppable forces, provides the very reason for its preservation in literature. I say paradoxically because there is a rather desperate double-shuffle in an argument that takes a firm stand against text that does not emanate from the soil, yet suggests that in the absence of soil just such a disembodied text, robbed of its referent, may have to do. In this way, text must play an instrumental, even propagandist, role against the (other) text that is transmitted by all these evil machines. There is a general, that is to say not necessarily explicitly organicist, feeling in the paedocentric tradition that

modern children need warmth, love and a measure of disarray to counteract the cold efficiency of the planned society which threatens to engulf them [...].<sup>22</sup>

Even though the importance of the countryside to this notion is not expressed here, it is so often the backdrop of such sentiments that it can be readily understood, taken as read, or supplied. Nor are we to see this as regressive or escapist, but as a forward-looking cultural battle. So we must

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<sup>22</sup> Elaine Moss, 'The Kitchen Maddonna by Rumer Godden', in *Part of the Pattern*, pp.26-7 (p.27) (first publ. *Spectator*, 1967).

"counterpoise such innocence to the advance of industrialism and its grimly utilitarian and computational machinery" (Inglis, p.7).

And where does this "innocence" or "magic" lie but in representations of the organic? Indeed, it is in the pastoral that Raymond Williams, to whom this chapter clearly owes a debt, finds that

a retrospective radicalism, against the crudeness and narrowness of a new moneyed order, is often made to do service as a critique of the capitalism of our own day [...]. A necessary social criticism is then directed to the safer world of the past [...].<sup>23</sup>

In the present instance, kiddie-lit criticism is the very home of such a tendency. Thus, for instance, Kate Greenaway's bo-peep vision of society can be drafted in as radical, subversive critique.

Greenaway's world was also completely rural and preindustrial; it can be seen as a silent protest against what the railways and the factories were doing to the English countryside [...].

(Lurie, *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups*, p.52)

To this critic, the element of protest in Greenaway seems not so much silent as imperceptible. Lurie goes on to recount the story of the senile Ruskin's interest in her work; mightn't this suggest a link with some sort of Christian socialism? Sadly, on Lurie's own admission, Ruskin was, at this point in his life, more interested in commissioning pictures of "girlies" without "frocks and frills" (*Don't Tell the Grown-Ups*,

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<sup>23</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), pp.35-6.

p.58). If Lurie's use of this line of argument is, thus, merely risible, other critics are nevertheless fiercely determined that we should not take it as a soft option.

The depiction of pre-industrial society as desirable is not a withdrawal in the sense of a shirking of responsibility. Rather it is a revolt against precisely that indirect form of violence which has created a widespread need for release from a sense of imprisonment by regulations and data-banks, constant official prying into private life and a devaluation of personal dignity.<sup>24</sup>

Such "radicalism" is indeed retrospective in that it places itself within the blurry image of a world conveniently beyond reach. In this way both past and present are caricatured rather than critiqued. In essence, the criticism of modernity comprises a list of annoyances one might wish to do without. The past, on the other hand, is loosely imagined as a kind of ideological duty-free zone where there was a sort of society, but not one that determined one's life in any radically wicked way. The real contradiction in this, however, is that though present society is seen as all-powerful and crushingly overdetermining, its effect can apparently be avoided by an imaginative displacement of one's person to the countryside. Whatever the case, what is at stake is the liberation of the *individual* from the too-imperious dictates of our epoch, rather than necessarily changing the dictates. The sort of revolution thus envisaged is thoroughly personal, or rather individualistic. Persons are at once determined by their society, and granted the opportunity – by what or whom one cannot say – to exit it.

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<sup>24</sup> Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature Since 1945* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p.229.

The manner in which one is to do this is further individualistic, in that it usually involves buying oneself out of the system, presumably using money gained therein, so as to distance oneself from its most obvious effects in some remote village. For if this narrative does continue to have an effect or a practice in the real world, this lies in the middle-class diaspora to the wild places. Curiously enough, this dispersed community has recently begun to show tentative signs of embracing some of the very technology once demonized; for the age of the tele-commuter is upon us. It is a commonplace of the property or, more disingenuously, the "living" pages of the liberal press that "all that traffic and dogshit grinds you down",<sup>25</sup> not to mention "the general degradation of city life" (McGhie, p.67). One would be a fool, then, not to move to the greenbelt. There, one is in search not only of tranquillity, but also of *community*.

"We didn't know our neighbours. We moved here and felt the world open up"

(McGhie, p.69)

Yet, these ruralists have brought a little bit of the city with them; indeed, it is computer technology that allows them to continue working in the country as they would have done in the city.

Modern incomers like Maggie and Mick Waltho are using high technology to create a simple life.

(McGhie, p.67)

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<sup>25</sup> Caroline McGhie, 'The New Ruralists, Part 3: Magic of the Moors', *Independent on Sunday Review*, 18 April 1993, pp.66-69 (p.69).



Indeed, no less a figure than William Mayne seems to register a similar shift in attitude. He is still identifiable as a proponent of continuity and the rural way as he

has lived here for 35 years; he's the treasurer and stout defender of the traditions of its local Institute, or village hall.<sup>26</sup>

Yet "he is also passionate about giving [children] a chance to develop computer literacy at an early age", and it is magic that once more leaps in to bridge the gulf:

Mayne sits like a magician at his mighty computer.

(Carey, p.10)

In a sense, all that is happening here is that computer technology is being mystified into the organic network much as, say, blacksmithery has been. For, as the reader will have noticed, many of the versions of the organic way outlined thus far contain not only plant rock and animal, but a variety of distinctly human/social artefacts. Occasionally we are told of a machine, or a particular version of a machine, that is suited to its environment.

It was a train, suitable to deep country, a ridiculous unlikely toy engine with goods trucks, and the only train in the day.

(Boston, *The River at Green Knowe*, p.24)

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<sup>26</sup> Joanna Carey, 'The Mayne Adventure', *Guardian* 2, 25 March 1993, p.10.

Somehow, this machine seems different from the "cars [...] puffing out stink" (Boston, *The River at Green Knowe*, p.37) found in the city, and will presumably be exempt from the cataclysm reserved for other, less discreet, blots on the landscape.

If after several years of low rainfall people began to forget the past and put out plans for building housing estates on the meadows, or factories on the banks, the river would suddenly wake up, turn over in its bed, and pour deep lakes of water over half the country.

(Boston, *The River at Green Knowe*, p.10)

Similarly, Mayne's "mighty computer" may well be produced in a factory that belches ozone-threatening fumes, from materials mined from the rainforest. No matter; in its immediate effects, it is discreet, clean and noiseless and may be allowed to take root.

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The great advantage of this technology, and what endears it to the modern rural incomer, is that it enables one to move to the country without bringing half the city's problems in tow. This of course is the beauty of the new international division of labour where its effects are considered locally. Let us note a certain confusion of the local and global in organicist thinking; in caring passionately for one's locale, one may forget its dependence on other less salubrious locales. In Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Moon of Gomerath*, it is industry that has driven the Lios Alfar – the elves – from their lands.

'When men turned from the sun and the earth, and corrupted the air with the smoke of furnaces, it was poison to the lios alfar; the scab of brick and tile that spread over this land withered their hearts.'

(*Brisingamen*, p.178)

The wizard Cadellin who recounts this to us acts as a spokesman, not so much for the elves as for that other species of little people, the NIMBY, whose profoundest dream has been to escape utterly all signs of the cities created by the economic system on which their own wealth depends. Mythologising the industrial revolution, and thus making it a matter of personal, immediate evil, is an important preliminary to denying one's own implication in its effects. With the insouciance of those who have done well enough in the system to buy themselves out of it, and with the added luxury of being able to condemn it from on high, the Neo-Arcadians of kiddie-lit disdain the city, industry and all the other modern horrors they have left behind.

The issue is one of ownership, or more precisely, of the terms of ownership. One can possess in a metaphysical sense, allied to naming and a belonging to the landscape, that transcends money. This sense is often achieved at the very close of the text.

Through hand and eye, block, forge and loom to the hill and all that he owned, he  
sledged sledged sledged for the black and glittering night and the sky flying on fire  
and the expectation of snow.

(Garner, *The Stone Book Quartet*, p.224)

But even if one is to hold naming as a form of possession, one must first have the requisite landscape before one, and sadly, unlike Adam in Paradise, these days this means buying, a shamefully commercial activity fraught with potential corruption, and the possibility of adding to the spoliation one seeks to escape. How is one to make the difficult transition from city to countryside?

One answer is that not all urban incomers are equally tainted. The wounding and scarring of the landscape already noted is not inflicted merely by houses, nor by the fact of human habitation, nor even exclusively by excessive technology, but most especially by quasi-suburban housing schemes. The estate often becomes synonymous with the destructive element of urban overspill. Thus, in following the elves into the trackless places, one's choice of property is of prime importance.

The difficulties implicit in such manoeuvres have not escaped Alan Garner in the novels that follow *Brisingamen* and *Gomrath*. In *Elidor* (1965) the NIMBY position is taken up by a character quite differently placed in terms of gender, race and occupation than the wizard Cadellin.

Mrs Watson spoke of it as a country cottage, which it may have been a hundred years earlier, but now it stood in a suburban road [...].<sup>27</sup>

A family seeking retreat may thus be distressed to find the city catching up with them. Mrs Watson's ideals are firmly in the Rousseau tradition – she believes “it was worth the sacrifice for the children to be able to grow up in the country” (p.62) – yet she has clearly not made the right buy. Hemmed in by “these teenage gangs off the overspill” (p.101), Mrs Watson, taking careful aim at her own foot, declares,

‘They shouldn’t be allowed to build out in the country. People aren’t going to change when they move from the city.’

(*Elidor*, p.108)

Garner, in an earlier book, has already made his feelings on weekendening city-dwellers quite plain.

The woods were peopled with townfolk who, shouting and crashing through the undergrowth, and littering the ground with food wrappings and empty bottles, completely destroyed the atmosphere of the place. Once, indeed, Colin and Susan came upon a family sprawled in front of the iron gates. Father, his back propped against the rock itself, strained, redder than his braces, to lift his voice above the blare of a portable radio to summon his children to tea.

(*Brisinghamen*, p.75)

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<sup>27</sup> Alan Garner, *Elidor* (London: Lions, 1974), p.62.

What appears, above, to come straight from the heart of the text, is thus curiously positioned in *Elidor*, in the mouth of the ridiculous Mrs Watson. *Elidor*, however, by no means represents an unequivocal *volte face* on Garner's part. For while the mother's adult voice reflects anxieties of the time – urban overspill, teenage gangs – the children simply, and very nearly intransitively, transcend by finding a way into the other, green, world of *Elidor* itself. In a limited sense, *Elidor* marks a move away from the simple NIMBY politics of Garner's earlier novels; the economic and social ambivalence of the urban bourgeoisie's flight to the country is, to some extent, faced. Mrs Watson is clearly self-deceiving and hypocritical; she is exposed as part of the very urban dilution of the country that she affects to despise. It remains significant, nevertheless, that the problem is resolved through an adult/child divide. Garner seems to regard the adult solution as hopelessly compromised; only the purity of the child can regain paradise for and in *Elidor*. Even then, he is not at all sure they can do the same for Manchester. Having accomplished their quest, they still have to return to their own squalid world, as the novel's ending grimly makes clear.

The children were alone with the broken windows of a slum.

(*Elidor*, p.160)

In its pessimism and the unrelatedness of its "real" and fantasy worlds, *Elidor* is something of an anomaly. Like the statue of Watt at the novel's beginning, it seems "very sick of Manchester" (p.7), but is, by the same token, similarly unable to leave. Wisely, Garner has since plunged deeper and deeper into the country, leaving the city to its own devices.

More typically, James Harrison, hero of *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe*, is in no doubt as to where he belongs. This is clear from his contempt for the housing estate, whose inhabitants are exemplified by

a pale girl with plaits, no doubt from the world of fitted kitchens and carpeted stairs [...].

(*Lively, Thomas Kempe*, pp.11-12)

This is a creature from another world, one not as robust, healthy and invigorating as James's Rousseauist rustic retreat. While there is an air of superiority in James's rejection of this other world, his snobbery might easily evade being detected as such. For James and the girl are of the same social class; his family are no more authentic country folk than the girl. What sets the Harrisons apart is that they are incomers who have made, it is implied, the right, the distinguished choice in buying an old cottage with uneven walls and floors, and no mod-cons. The choice of the other, fitted-carpet world leaves one open to the charge of vulgarity, or even vandalism. The opposition is based along lines of authenticity; with the choice of the old cottage, one throws one's lot in with continuity and graceful change, and buys into the old, true ways.

In following this latter course, the Harrison's have made the first step towards countrification (and hence salvation), but they are not home and dry. For here a further moral divide awaits them; one must be *receptive* to the message that the countryside holds, waiting to be read from the soil. The untainted child will, of course find it easier to subvert his parents' corruption. There is, however, a further opposition here that gives James, as a boy child, an advantage. For the little girl from the estate is envied by his sister.

Helen preferred the new houses in the estate the other side of Ledsham.

(*Thomas Kempe*, pp.8-9)

Boy's tastes are quite different.

'It's such a quaint, odd-proportioned place [...]. I know any boy would love it for his own.'

(*Thomas Kempe*, p.104)

It should thus be noted that those priggish little girls who value domesticity are apt to prefer the all mod-cons house to the rickety old cottage that demands a boyish robustness.

She'd not noticed the possibilities of the rubbish heap at the far end of the orchard, full of stuff chucked out by the workmen.

(*Thomas Kempe*, p.9)

Girls play a curious double role in relation to nature. They may be the very receptacles of intuition and a symbiotic fusion with the landscape, but to qualify for this part, they must first avoid the monstrous artificiality to which they are particularly prone. So, for example, Mary in Garner's *Stone Book*, who is "fed up with being a lad" (p.18), hankers after a sophisticated feminine domesticity.

"I want to live in a grand house, and look after every kind of beautiful thing you can think of: old things: brass."

(*Quartet*, p.22)



In the end, of course, she learns to follow in the footsteps of her father the frugal mason, but only by resisting the siren voice of ambition. One sees this narrative in condensed form in Philippa Pearce's story 'Her Father's Attic'.

Mrs Brunning had faith in her daughter's looks. 'She'll be picked out,' she said. 'She'll go up to London and be a model. Or go on telly.'<sup>28</sup>

The mother's dreams clearly spring from dissatisfaction with her own life; she does not want her daughter to marry "some drudging clodhopper" (p.72) like her husband. In effect, it is the dirt she despises; Rosamund must play indoors "because her mother hated farm-filth, as she called it, ever to be on her feet." (p.73). She is a snob who entertains in the living room while her husband is engaged in honest toil in the fields; there is no doubt whose side we are meant to be on. Nor is there any doubt as to how the daughter will choose between the honest land and the whorish commercialism of the city. Judith to a female Bluebeard, Rosamund strays into the attic where, locked in a cupboard, she relives her father's childhood imprisonment by his brothers. After this we find Rosamund "staring at her father as at somebody strange to her, and of the strangest importance" (p.80). Implicit in this recognition of the father is the rejection of a *mother* hooked on the city. As the representative of an excessive, upholstered hygiene, there is a seeming inevitability to the logic that makes the latter a hate-figure, a point of non-recognition in this respect. What is at stake is not merely the choice between washing machines and fields, but one of sexuality. The city spells modelling and telly; is in short whorish.

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<sup>28</sup> Philippa Pearce, *The Shadow-Cage* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1978), p.72.

For Jane Gardam also the marks of smart city life appear particularly indecent in a mother. The country verdict on a visiting T.V. presenter is "I've never taken to her. She looks fast" (*The Hollow Land*, p.98). From her unwholesomeness as a person, her unsuitability as a mother is quickly deduced.

"Poor young child," said Grandad Hewitson, "with a dandy-dee of that sort for a mother."

(*The Hollow Land*, p.99)

The child is subsequently "saved" by frequent visits to the country.

She fed the chickens and gathered the eggs and mixed the gingerbreads and grew a very chattery, cheerful girl.

(*The Hollow Land*, p.110)

There seems to be a feeling that artifice, whether it be technological, intellectual or sexual, is especially unwholesome in woman. For women, perversion from the true and natural way is to be guarded against with especial vigour. Otherwise they are a danger to men and children, luring them away from the land. In *The Owl Service*, Alan Garner, with his commendably blunt misogyny, does not mince his words over the cause of Roger's personality problems. Clearly his natural mother is to blame.

'It's only Roger's way,' said Alison, 'and he feels dreadful about it afterwards. He's had a pretty rough time. His mother walked out, you know, and Mummy says it was all in the papers. Mummy calls her "the Birmingham Belle".'

(*The Owl Service*, p.95)

Alison's mother, on the other hand, though constantly alluded to, curiously never makes an appearance in the text. Alison meanwhile has problems with her own sexual identity. This, it would appear, is because, unlike Gwyn the quasi-peasant, she does not belong to the natural landscape.

'You came a week ago, and you know everything as if you've always lived here-- while I've been spending holidays at the house all my life, and yet I don't belong. I'm as useless as one of those girls in fashion photographs -- just stuck in a field of wheat, or a puddle, or on a mountain, and they look gorgeous but they don't know where they are. I'm like that. I don't belong.'

(*The Owl Service*, pp.74-5)

Poor Alison does not have a great deal of choice as regards femininity; her possible roles are defined by an ancient Welsh legend.

'She was made for her lord. Nobody is asking her if she wants him. It is a bitter twisting to be shut up with a person you are not liking very much. I think she is often longing for the time when she was flowers on the mountain, and it is making her cruel, as the rose is growing thorns.'

(*The Owl Service*, p.53)

This, in short, is the entire repertoire of femininities offered by organicism. For women it is of capital importance to reject the artificiality of modern society, or else risk becoming a monster. Occasional maladroit attempts at feminism in kiddie-lit usually run aground on this opposition, presenting a positive image of natural femininity that rests on a kindly but firm warning to avoid artifice, or face the consequences. Robert

Swindells's *A Serpent's Tooth* does something of the sort. Firstly, men, it is implied, are selfish because they are caught up in the wheels of industry. Thus, one father is affronted to discover that his idyll is to be disturbed by the noise, rather than the environmental threat, of nuclear dumping.

"I bought this house as a sanctuary; a haven, where a busy man can unwind in the evenings and relax at weekends."

(Swindells, *A Serpent's Tooth*, p.11)

Thus, again, the NIMBY position is disavowed and recuperated by attributing it to the text's choice of demonized party; in this case, men. So also, when Lucy and her mother protest against the danger of pollution, it is the men of the commercial world who offer opposition.

"It's not a farm now, though. A businessman owns it. Mr. Ogden. He doesn't like us. We have to make a hole in the barricade every time he wants to pass, and he has to wait."

The Range Rover stopped and a man stuck his head out of the window. "Get your infernal rubbish out of the way will you? I'm in a hurry."

(Swindells, p.34)

He is off, one presumes, in a mad dash to make more money. *A Serpent's Tooth* wants to be taken as radical environmentalist, anti-NIMBY and, most of all, feminist. We know this because the anti-nuclear protesters "don't believe in dressing to please men" (p.86) and in the end "Mum can't face going home" (p.134). Yet these issues are still pointedly organised along the lines of a female/intuitive versus male/evil-commercial opposition that arguably does more to reinstate thoroughly patriarchal notions of dippy idealist/intuitive femininity than anything

else. As such, it is another division of moral labour that rather begs the question of who will produce one's wellingtons and Barbour jacket in the putative feminized organic world.

In the drama of adult sin and child redemption, nature girl and bad mother may thus go hand in hand, as part of the machinery that attributes true peasanthood. First published in 1972, K.M. Peyton's *A Pattern of Roses* acts out this drama with particular clarity. Tim's parents have bought an original country dwelling so as to build a dream home.

'I like the old bit best.' But the old bit, to his parents, the scrap of weatherboard cottage, two up, two down, had merely been a way of getting planning permission to build their own idea of a country house, grafting onto the original an expensive and very desirable wing that had been the talk of the nearest village for the past year. (Peyton, p.9)

At the outset Tim shows, in this way, an appreciation of the old that runs counter to his parents' plans, yet is not strongly opposed.

There was nothing in the lane except their own house, sprawling and acutely new – to Tim's eyes brash, almost an outrage, among the green hedges and elm-trees. His parents had found this delectable site, and destroyed its beauty by putting their house there. 'That's not fair,' Tim said to himself. 'If they hadn't done it, someone else would.'

(Peyton, p.16)

He is thus initially positioned as a rationalising apologist for property development; it is just how things work, it has to happen. Being on the side of the child in this text means not only starting from Tim's

consciousness, but gradually working from the seed of organic feeling therein, against the advertising agent values of his parents. The catalyst for this process is Rebecca, daughter of the local trendy vicar. At first glance, she is repellently unadorned.

She did nothing at all to make herself more attractive, although she could well have done with it.

(Peyton, p.21)

Similarly, her Bohemian household cuts against the grain of the expectations that Tim's upbringing has fostered.

Tim, used to his mother's impeccable housekeeping, was amazed by the casual shambles of the Vicarage interior.

(Peyton, p.21)

One might suspect already that Rebecca is going to stand for nature and contempt for all things commercial, and this is indeed what emerges.

'Advertising is immoral. All that money - for what?'

She had a down on money, Tim thought. It fitted, he supposed. He wasn't going to be drawn.

(Peyton, p.33)

Tim is, at first guarded; he is not "going to be drawn." He is still sufficiently the child of his parents to resist the organic sensitivity which we, nevertheless, know is there, submerged by loyalty. He will certainly not open up to this strange, unmade-up girl. It is not long, however,

before he begins to notice her worth, through the medium of nature, and shared recognition.

Tim began to see what Rebecca had meant about the park not being a place for a modern housing estate. The woods fell back from the path and the ground dipped into a long shallow valley with a lake in the bottom. The woods above it on both sides gave it a strange secrecy, the water unruffled by the fresh autumn breeze, dark and deep and still.

(Peyton, p.36)

The process of Tim's ruralization is by no means complete, but, with a sense of discomfort, he is becoming conscious that this is a town/country divide.

Tim felt very urban and constricted – and rather tired. [...] He hoped she would decide to walk back when she had finished being a nature girl.

(Peyton, p.38)

In fact, under Rebecca's influence, Tim is reluctantly becoming something of a nature boy, giving him ground on which to face his parents. Meeting Rebecca's blacksmith, the dream of a rural way seems at first just that – a dream.

He wished he were free to try his hand at blacksmithery. Better than a factory by far. The advertising agency was a factory in a sense.

(Peyton, p.56)

Escape still seems an impossibility, but Tim has recognized his prison bars for what they are. The next nudge needed comes from his

parents. As he reports to Rebecca, while she is doing a "pollution project" for school in her kitchen.

'My mother wants to move back to London. She says she's going mad.'

(Peyton, p.92)

Clearly the adults, and especially the mother, cannot handle the countryside; its ways are too alien to their commercial values. Nor can they handle Tim's rejection of the family firm. The conflict is coming out into the open, and Tim can begin to seriously question his future choices. Everywhere he looks in the modern landscape, he sees a factory.

Once back in the machine, on the University conveyor belt, he would never find the courage again to step off.

(Peyton, p.101)

As his parents plan to move back to the city, a split, at once geographical and ideological, is imminent. Again, it is Tim's mother, a weak woman steeped in ideas of cleanliness and respectability, who objects.

His mother had wept. 'Just a common labouring job! How could you, Tim? After all we've done!'

(Peyton, p.131)

Clearly she just doesn't understand, for, besotted with bourgeois values of advancement, she cannot see the positive value of Tim's decision to become a blacksmith. Tim, however, can now openly affirm



his desire, not as a dream, but as something that fits, works, has a function in a certain order.

'It's a more useful job than my father's,' he said.

(Peyton, p.163)

Interestingly, Tim is nevertheless aware that he cannot simply go back in time. His blacksmithery will be mainly "domestic" work. The country way, the old way, is best, but even it is susceptible to a certain type of progress; one that will lead us away from the misery of the nineteenth century labourer Tom Inskip who is Tim Ingram's correlate.

'There have to be openings, ambitions, even in this. Otherwise it is back to Tom again. There was nothing for him.'

(Peyton, p.167)

At this point, Tim has learned to appreciate Rebecca's unforced charms, just as he has learned to love the countryside, and we leave the three together. One may well ask for whom Tim will do this "domestic" ironwork; presumably incomers with more taste than his parents. There are thus grey areas in the otherwise stark opposition of unlovely advertising agents and honest blacksmiths, but they are not explored. Tim would seem to have done enough simply by sloughing off his parents – liberating himself – and embracing the countryside. In so doing, he has also had to choose which version of femininity he wants, that of Rebecca, or that of his mother.

The narratives outlined above serve as qualifying heats for entry into the authentic countryside; for clearly not everyone can be allowed to

live there. The basic idea is that adults are hopelessly compromised, but that children, especially boys, can still redeem themselves. Complementing this is the not unrelated notion that little girls usually pass, but grown women may be more difficult.

All of these may be seen as various responses to a felt need to accommodate a legitimate ownership of a sphere beyond the social into a world that is regrettably suffused with commercial relations. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that in spite of what would seem to be a major demographic shift, those who transact the business side of the deal are not much in evidence. Estate agents only very occasionally appear, and even then, according to Philippa Pearce in 'The Strange Illness of Mr Arthur Cook', they are called "Ketch, Robb and Biley", and their presence is remarkable.

'Why's *he* come?', whispered Judy. (And, although the Cooks were not to know this, Mr Biley did not usually accompany clients in order to clinch deals.)

(Pearce, *The Shadow Cage*, p.129)

Mr Biley has good reason to be there; the garden is haunted by the spirit of its previous owner who, as Judy discovers after a spot of research, cannot rest until his beloved plot is in tasteful hands. As his widow reports to Mrs Cook,

'I knew - I *knew* he wouldn't leave that garden, after he'd died. I just hoped the next owners would look after it as lovingly as he'd done, and then in time he'd be content to go. That's what I hoped and prayed. But the first lot of people were going to cover it with dog-kennels, and I heard that the second lot were going to lay

it out with artificial streams and weeping willows and things. Well, he made their lives a misery, and they left. And now your husband [...].'

(*The Shadow Cage*, p.146)

Mr Cook has brought his kids to the country from the town where they had "only a paved backyard" (p.130), and has, in spite of his previous indifference, become obsessed with gardening. It is through this conversion to horticulture that the ghost is laid, and Mr Cook can become the *true* owner of the garden. There are thus two stages in the purchase of the property; one material, and conducted by the shady estate agent; the other spiritual, and mediated by the girl-child, Judy. The first, belonging to the adult world of the market, has hitherto been insufficient, leading to a string of short, curtailed tenancies. Only the latter, that of the child innocent of exchange, can secure the deal, making the Cooks the final and true owners. It is on this metaphysical notion of purchase and property that the child literature of rural retreat tends to focus, rather than the reviled estate agent's economic machinations, for it is secured by the child's innocence. Yet this is not a complete truth, for it is also the prize of a specific sort of knowledge that gains the title deeds to the land's past; one that I will term "archaeological".

## chapter five

### Excavating the Past

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Il ne reste donc qu'à se fabriquer sa vision, s'imaginer avec soi-même les créatures d'un autre temps, s'incarner en elles, endosser, si l'on peut, l'apparence de leur défroque, se forger enfin, avec des détails adroitement triés, de fallacieux ensembles.<sup>1</sup>

It may come as a surprise to many readers to learn that archaeology, of all things, is a central pursuit of the characters in many of the texts in my period. The following two quotations will, I hope, suggest something of the particularity of the role played by archaeology in kiddie-lit in the present instance.

'Look what we've been missing! We can be ARCHAEOLOGISTS of our OWN lives!'<sup>2</sup>

As with many other British writers, Mayne's sense of landscape is intertwined with an almost archaeological sense of the past. [...] For him history is literally hidden beneath the landscape, and may appear at any time [...].

(Lurie, 'William Mayne', p.372)

The first is taken from Peter Blegvad's 'Leviathan', a series of cartoons that appears in the *Sunday Review* magazine of *The Independent* that sporadically deals, often in a bizarre fashion, with a variety of tenets of pedagogical belief. Thus, in the above instance, two parents who join their child – Leviathan – on the floor sifting through diverse domestic leavings (fluff etc.) are pleased to describe this activity as archaeology. The word archaeologist is pointedly capitalised, yet the point will escape the

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<sup>1</sup> J.-K. Huysmans, *Là-Bas* (Paris: Plon, 1908), p.20.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Blegvad, 'Leviathan', *Independent on Sunday*, 9 February 1992, p.36.

reader unaware that Blegvad's adults are mouthing a commonplace; that their child has led them to an understanding of their own lives.

Alison Lurie on the other hand, writing explicitly about kiddie-lit, affects a more ambivalent tone, at once tentative and assertive. She clearly wishes to draw our attention to something of importance, but seems reluctant to constrain herself to too nice, too concrete a definition. There is, in the works of certain writers, some sort of "sense of the past" that is "*almost* archaeological" (emphasis mine), but which seemingly escapes more precise definition or categorisation.

Such coyness merits a blunt response. There is nothing "almost" about this archaeological sense. The word "archaeology" itself is commonly and explicitly invoked in the texts obliquely indicated by Lurie. A critique that presents itself as gesturing towards some undefinable current beneath the surface, is in fact simply retailing what is often announced on the book's back cover, before reading even begins.

The story goes something like this. Moving into a new house in the country, a child finds an object of obscure origin and arcane import with which s/he rapidly becomes infatuated. Strange things start to happen that lead him/her to suspect that some mystery lurks around his/her find. At this point, s/he embarks on a voyage of discovery through local libraries, newspaper archives and/or folk legend that will lead him/her to the riddle's answer. Dodging the company of those around him/her, particularly adults, s/he is drawn into a deeper sympathy with the original owner of the object (now deceased), often a child who has some sort of affinity with the present-day protagonist. Through this pen-pal from the past, an insight into "history" is gained. Once the

purpose of the object, the part it played in the lives of others, and so on are understood, we leave child (and ghost) to rest easy, historical curiosity sated, a new understanding of life and mortality reached.

The various elements of this story reappear with unnerving frequency and an eerie familiarity. Indeed, it would be hard to name another narrative in any field that is reproduced so faithfully, so often, and by so many different authors. Furthermore, the elements themselves – the organic, the timeslip – are by no means unfamiliar in the generality of kiddie-lit, though coordinated in a highly organized form. In effect, Lurie's reluctant periphrasis, in discovering a diffuse archaeological *sense*, avoids the naming of a *genre*.

There is no real mystery as to why one should wish to avoid such categorisation. There are already enough books for children that are openly generic. Any number of child hobbies have their own discrete places in writing for children. Sports such as football and horse-riding have fictional counterparts which are, if crassly gender-oriented and undistinguished in literary terms, numerous and saleable. For babysitters, there is the babysitters' club, for detectives, a whole industry in detective stories. In each case, a particular pursuit or quasi-occupation is made the selling point of a fiction destined for an interested public that wants *a* horse story, *a* detective story and so on. Consequently, the writers of such fictions are not to be seen as *authors*, any more than their work is to be seen as *literature*. They are, in short, more or less explicitly *generic*, down to cover design, publication in series and so forth.

Such, however, is not the case with the archaeological story. Even though it may be thought of as a sort of cousin of the detective yarn, it is

not, unlike its poor relation, to be collapsed into a genre. On the contrary, there is an *archaeological sense* which one notices, and approves, in works that remain quite discrete, autonomous, grace of their over-riding literary singularity. The archaeological story has thus somehow traversed the mysterious space that separates the commonplace from the universal, the expectation of the familiar (vulgar) from recognitions of real value (culturally consecrated).

This privileged position is all the more remarkable when one considers the extent to which these texts resemble each other. One can easily point to instances where "influence" is at work. Compare for example the start of two tales by Penelope Lively and Philippa Pearce respectively.

'What's this then?' [...]. One of the men, prising a chunk of rotten wood from the window frame, had let fall a small bottle wedged behind. It broke as it touched the floor: greenish glass with a sediment clinging to it.

(Lively, *Thomas Kempe*, p.5)

The little green stoppered bottle had been waiting in the earth a long time for someone to find it [...]. The bottom of the inside of the bottle was dirtied with something blackish and scaly that also clung a little to the sides.

(Pearce, *The Shadow-Cage*, p.9)

From each of the two bottles, a spirit is freed, setting off the events of the story. Further points of comparison are possible. Thus the figure of the workman discovering the vital relic while renovating an old house used by Lively (above) is also found in *A Pattern of Roses*.



'Might find the old hidden treasure – you never know!'

The builder scooped a long arm up the doomed chimney [...].

(Peyton, p.7 )

Such similarities are indeed minute and striking, and a discussion along the lines of "plagiarism" or "influence" might be expected to follow. Yet apparently kiddie-lit criticism feels there is no mystery to be solved here. Similarities notwithstanding, these works are not to be thought of as belonging to a *genre*, certainly not in the sense of the word that has as its adjective *generic*. Indeed, they number amongst the highest achievements of the best authors in the field.

Thus, merely to question the originality of these texts would be to miss the point. What is really of interest is that it is the very recurrence of certain tropes that, far from constituting a genre, may, in a particular case, be taken as the indicator of deep cultural value. It is this level of communal value that I wish to address, rather than the – often fatuous – question of originality, which in any case does not necessarily trouble producers and critics in the field. Alan Garner has, indeed, stated that he is "convinced that there are no original stories".

On several occasions I have 'invented' an incident, and then come across it in an obscure fragment of Hebridean lore, orally collected, and privately printed, a hundred years ago.

(Garner, *Comrath*, pp.154-55)

Rather than challenge the value of his work, Garner's disingenuous apology registers a note of pride; the oral and ancient source confers on the text a deeper authenticity than any amount of modernist innovation ever

could for such a writer. In this matter, he has in John Rowe Townsend a sympathetic critic.

When Alan Garner's first book, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, appeared in 1960, there were many who thought that Garner was indebted to Tolkien. In fact he did not know Tolkien's work, but undoubtedly he knew some of Tolkien's sources.

(*Written for Children*, p.221)

In intuitively regaining the archaic source of the old tale, the very writing process thereby becomes archaeological. It springs not so much from current print-matter as from deeper, more ancient narratives that are seen as corresponding to the child-mind.

It is precisely the archaeological sense, the organising virtue of these texts, that saves them from falling into the generic. For if these may appear at first glance to be tales of magic and the supernatural – ghost stories – this is not necessarily how they are described by critics; the archaeological approach is quite consonant with the nebulous quality of "realism" to which I have already alluded elsewhere.

Philippa Pearce is particularly good at conveying the strangeness that lies behind the everyday. This gift enables her to step outside the borders of realism without any loss of conviction [...].

(Townsend, *Written for Children*, p.249)

For, according to Townsend, "little is ordinary when looked at freshly with clear eyes" (*Written for Children*, p.249). His stake in achieving this neat double shuffle is the inclusion of Philippa Pearce's *The Shadow Cage* – subtitled 'and other tales of the supernatural' – in a chapter

headed, 'Realism, British Style'. The effect is to annexe magical happenings to a notion of reality extended by enhanced powers of perception. The text thus described belongs, generically, neither to "realism" nor to the "supernatural". Curiously, even the by now long respectable "magic realism" has not yet been claimed as a relation. In fact, such a text seems to transcend any nice definition. For want of neat labels, the critic is forced to pick and mix.

*Winter Quarters* [by William Mayne], though a realistic narrative, is full of near-magical events.

(Lurie, 'William Mayne', p.374)

As in Townsend above, the real forms a sort of base from which the magical can be comfortably extrapolated. Indeed *without* this ballast, magical events may be seen as purely gratuitous. This is one reason why Neil Philip finds the works of Susan Cooper generally wanting in substance.

It seems to me that the books claim for their events a symbolic value which is unjustified because it is neither allied to a fully fledged metaphysic nor anchored by a believable reality.<sup>3</sup>

Not every critic would agree with this evaluation of *The Dark is Rising* sequence, but the criteria applied are common in the field; the metaphysical and the concrete must flow in and out of each other, or else a text risks being "instant whip", Philip's derogatory term for *mere* fantasy. Writers may thus quite naturally wish to advertise their adherence to the

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<sup>3</sup> Neil Philip, 'Fantasy: Double Cream or Instant Whip?', *Signal*, 35 (1981) 82-95 (p.83).

regulations. Robert Westall, in an author's note to *The Watch House*, declares that

a satisfactory spook should have a metabolism, a purpose and a *modus operandi*.  
[...]. I felt the only way forward for me was to find an historic building with  
intriguing contents [...].<sup>4</sup>

This "only way forward" is none other than the archaeological, that which gives substance to the supernatural. Once he has accepted the ground rules, the author is seemingly compelled to pursue a certain narrative thread. According to the number of texts that have taken up a similar thread, this compulsion would seem to have been particularly strong in the period from the late 1950s to the present. The results may be considered as epoch-making.

The sixties will go down in the history of English children's literature as the years in which the power of the landscape was developed as a living force in fantasy [...].<sup>5</sup>

For it was then that, according to Moss, Garner, Mayne and their peers "brought the past into the present" ('The Fantastic Living Force', p.29). If Moss is to be believed, there is something new and extraordinary going on here. The felt need to reconcile magic and the everyday, however, goes back some way further. Writing at roughly the same time (1959) that Pearce and Mayne are setting the pace, Roger Lancelyn Green credits E. Nesbit with the important discovery that

<sup>4</sup> Robert Westall, *The Watch House* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1980), p.203.

<sup>5</sup> Elaine Moss, 'The Fantastic Living Force of Landscape', in *Part of the Pattern*, pp.29-30 (p.29) (first publ. *The Times* 1967).

magic will work and seem quite natural if it is kept under proper control and put in the most real-life setting [...].<sup>6</sup>

Green goes on to note that "in a setting of this kind a fairy would be out of place, and you will do much better with an unexpected creature" (pp.15-16). Hence we have a bizarre mammalian fairy like the Psammead, dug out of a sand pit, which would probably agree with Kipling's Puck in his contempt for these "made-up things" that usually pass for fairies, "little buzzflies with butterfly wings and gauze petticoats, and shiny stars in their hair".<sup>7</sup> In effect, what Puck is criticising is the too obviously generic nature of representations of the fantastic. The alternative, that preferred by Kipling and Nesbit, is something more homely, less artificial, what one critic has described as "the *daily*ness of [Nesbit's] magic" (Eager, 'Daily Magic', p.217). If, then, one is to accept that these writers set free the fairies (from the wicked didactic) one must add that they also domesticated them.

For many writers, there is a complete and distinct tradition here, starting with Nesbit. Thus Bob Newman, a New England, and anglophile, author singles out for praise those works which

introduced magic into the real world – *Five Children and It* is essentially the same as *Elidor*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Roger Lancelyn Green, 'Introduction' to E. Nesbit, *Five Children and It*, (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1959), p.15.

<sup>7</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p.49.

<sup>8</sup> Bob Newman qu. in Jay Williams, 'Looking for a Pattern', in *The Signal Approach to Children's Books* (Harmondsworth: Kestrel, 1980), p.18.

These two texts differ in as far as the former incorporates magic into the primary material world and the latter juxtaposes a grim reality with a separate secondary world. What makes them "essentially the same" is that they seek to balance the magical and the real in some way, and thus avoid the merely fantastical. This, then, is one of the central concerns of modern kiddie-lit from its inception, one that broadly constitutes a tradition or tendency – something quite distinct from a genre.<sup>9</sup>

If, however, one turns from *Five Children and It* to *The Story of the Amulet*, even more precise links with *Elidor* and its peer texts can be seen. The children are no longer in the setting that makes a Psammead possible.

The parlour in Fitzroy Street was a very flat background to magic happenings. Down in the country among the flowers and green fields anything had seemed – and indeed had been – possible.<sup>9</sup>

There is, however, no need to worry, for the children soon find an ancient amulet that "can make the corn grow, and the waters flow, and the trees bear fruit, and the little new babies come" (Nesbit, *Amulet*, p.38), and which, besides, puts all time at their disposal. These children, along with those who "take seizin" (take a lump of turf) of their father's meadow, and thus become its true owners and learn that "there's a great deal more to it than [they] or [their] father ever guessed" (Kipling, *Puck*, p.48), may fairly be said to be the earliest child archaeologists.

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<sup>9</sup> E. Nesbit, *The Story of the Amulet* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1959) p.63.

Since the late 1950s, after lying dormant for some time, this race has undergone not only a dramatic population explosion, but also a vertiginous development. The basic contention of the tradition remains that, while fantasy is good for the child, its wings ought nevertheless to be clipped, so that even a critic writing *In Defence of Fantasy* recognizes that there is a danger in "an over-abundance of fantasy" (Swinfen, p.101) and that it must not be overplayed. Garner's work, however – which is arguably at the cutting edge in this field – seems to register a progressively more strict adherence to this dictum, moving from the early Tolkien-inflected adventures, replete with goblins and wizards (*Brisinghamen*, *Gomrath*), through parallels between present and past (*The Owl Service* and *Red Shift*), to the stripped-down "realism" of *The Stone Book Quartet*, with not a ghost or goblin in sight. For Fred Inglis, this is a good thing, real progress. His criticism of the early Garner is precisely in line with what we have already seen.

The novelist seems all too ready with the embarrassing paraphernalia of a phoney magic language, ubiquitous spookiness and totems, two worlds, and all the rest of it.  
(Inglis, p.238)

Implicitly, the later Garner has moved beyond all this too-obviously generic material. It is worth noting, however, that in the early Garner the principles that lead to a supposedly accountable realism are in place from the outset. Here, even where such blatant improbabilities as elves are present, they can be established as part of the reality of the text by juxtaposition with other illusions which remain just that. A child consumed by unnameable fears on a dark road is relieved to meet an elf, rather than some monster of his imagination.

Colin staggered forward, laughing. A touch of reality – even such reality – and the scene had changed. Colin saw himself in perspective.

(Garner, *Gomrath*, p.61)

Improbability is self-consciously acknowledged – “even such reality” – and the guiding character shares and diffuses our disbelief. The elf is, after all, solid and not at all gauzy or nebulous. Nevertheless, the next logical step is to do without “such reality” altogether. By the time of the *Stone Book Quartet*, which is in this respect as in many others seen as a sort of pinnacle of achievement, all this has gone, and we are left with history pure and simple.

It is hard to imagine anyone bettering what he has done in *The Stone Book Quartet*, giving a finer expression to the theme of the child finding its place in the world by understanding history.

(Carpenter, *Secret Gardens*, p.221)

While the obvious, generic marks of *fantasy* are thus discarded along the way, the *metaphysical* assertion of the presence of the past remains. There is thus a tendency towards the equivocally magical recurrence of a past that is, in itself, quite feasible, if not mundane. Thus, the objects, places and people encountered by the child are not in themselves at all unlikely; the only improbability lies in the fact that they come from the past. In William Mayne's *Earthfasts*, the central characters carry through a rigorous policy of fine distinctions between the possible and what is there before one's eyes.

The trouble was that his mind did not want to believe what his sense told him.



What must be true was unbelievable and what is unbelievable can't be true.

(Mayne, *Earthfasts*, p.21)

The improbability in question is a centuries old drummer boy who has emerged from a hillside. To his credit, this improbability himself shares the scepticism of our heroes, Keith and David.

'It can't be so,' said Nellie Jack John. 'It would never be. I niver [sic] heard owt like it.'

(Mayne, *Earthfasts*, p.31)

We never get beyond dubiously poised paradoxes such as David's gnomic "unreal but actual" (p.34), and this we must accept, since "science doesn't know everything." (p.51). This version of the insufficiency of science is a particular *bête noire* of Mayne, but it is, as we shall see, central to the grounding of the particular "science" of archaeology in kiddie-lit, which intuits knowledge from the objective and has little time for ectoplasm. As far as possible, the historical sensitivity that brings past events into the present is to be distinguished on the one hand from the merely, generically "supernatural", and on the other, from blinkered scientific incredulity.

"I've not a lot of time for the supernatural, as it happens. I've never reckoned much on it. Table-tapping and things that go bump in the night and so forth. Most tales of that sort don't bear examination. [...]. This is a bit different."

(Lively, *Samuel Stokes*, p.64)

The "this" mentioned is the reappearance of Samuel Stokes's eighteenth century landscaped park by way of revenge against a tacky

housing scheme. This, we are to believe, because the plain-speaking Grandfather tells us so, is no mere ghost story. Rather it is an historical occurrence as yet beyond the grasp of science. To illustrate the point, we are given an example of academia's failure to cope with these strange events.

There is a professor from a university who is writing a book about the affair at this very moment in which he talks learnedly about something called mass hysteria [...]. I can imagine what Mrs Thornton would have to say about that. And a bit of over-excitement doesn't account for peacocks, Greek temples, and a great deal of very real water.

(*Lively*, Samuel Stokes, p.7)

Clearly it is science that is out of touch with reality. The archaeological story of today is concerned with things that *happen*, but which neither science nor the ghost story can explain.

'Not haunted,' said Gwyn after a while. 'More like – still happening?'

(Garner, *The Owl Service*, p.50)

When we have reached this stage, it is no longer a matter, as is arguably the case with Nesbit and Kipling, of *merely* revitalising a hackneyed genre. In its place is a remarkably developed metaphysical argument. For the child archaeologist has emerged as a figure capable of expanding the bounds of perceived reality without recourse to either fairies or science. Even magical amulets tend to disappear in favour of thoroughly mundane objects. We are to see in *Earthfasts*, Samuel Stokes and *The Owl Service* events and people that were real at some time, and that are somehow still there, emanating from the landscapes they once

inhabited and the objects they once possessed. This, indeed, is the great breakthrough effected by the archaeological story, continuing the rhetoric of real magic, but rendering that reality even more *concrete*.

Boston's "ghosts" are rendered in concrete terms, and the interaction between the past and the present (a common aspect of recent fiction) gives an oblique fascination to the straightforward historical events. In context the supernatural has a superrational basis; the convergence of different times in moments of intensity or special insight is an accepted convention. Boston has an unusual sensitivity, nothing to do with whimsy or free-range airy-fairy effects [...].<sup>10</sup>

Such "ghosts" are felt to merit quotation marks precisely because, far from being ectoplasmic, they spring from

a tangible residue of the experience of past generations, the overflow of one consciousness into another, the associative and regenerative power of objects.

(Craig, p.120)

In effect, the spooky totems of unbridled fantasy have been replaced by *material* remains, which are undeniably *there*, that is to say *real*. One thus slips easily into the idea that the past, contained in these objects, partakes of their concreteness in the here and now and awaits only sensitive examination to become apparent.

The novels of Penelope Farmer and Susan Cooper illuminate the ways in which marvellously enhanced physical powers may heighten human perception of the

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<sup>10</sup> Patricia Craig, 'Lucy M. Boston' in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, pp.119-121 (p.120).

immediate primary world, which our normal senses observe and interpret so crudely.

(Swinfen, p.125)

Children, untrammelled by adult science are said to possess this sensitivity. Furthermore, the form taken by magic in these texts – the re-occurrence of the past – is germane to the child's historical sensitivity. There is, of course, the long-standing commonplace that parallels the child's development with the motion of history itself, insinuating an affinity with "less developed", or "more primitive" eras. Thus Rosemary Sutcliff believes that her historical fiction for children

draws heavily on a feeling for the primitive and fundamental things in life. The young have this feeling very strongly.<sup>11</sup>

This idea, which one might term the developmental fallacy, finds a special place for that cobwebbed idea,

the role of the sensitive, alert child whose own developing maturity parallels and enhances the evolution of humanity's history on earth.

(Landsberg, p.172)

In this way, two pseudo-analogous propositions are collapsed into each other. The child, being supposedly unsocialised, has an affinity with the primitive and intuitive, and hence, secondarily, with emanations from previous, more *primitive* epochs of history. The first may be seen

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<sup>11</sup> Rosemary Sutcliff, 'History is People', in *Children and Literature: Views and Reviews* ed. by Virginia Haviland (London: Bodley Head, 1974), pp.306-312 (p.311).

in isolation in William Mayne's *A Grass Rope*. The child has heard something she could not have heard – an ancient hunting horn. Her father protests an overactive imagination.

'She's practically a savage: all little children are. She doesn't know yet which things are real and which are unreal.'

(*A Grass Rope*, p.81)

He is partially correct; Mary has heard something that is as magical as it is unreal; in a sense, as the book goes on to prove, it does not matter exactly what objective status this reality has. The fluidity in the boundaries between fact and fiction attributed to the child has a value that goes beyond empirical fact, allowing her to think what is, for the adult, the unthinkable or ridiculous. In any case, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and Mary turns out to be, in a sense, right. For in following the old tale of the hounds, she finds the factual base, the map, of the story. *A Grass Rope* thus values the fabulist in the child, but eschews full-blown fantasy.

In a sense, then, *A Grass Rope* is merely a specific version of this narrative. For while it is true that in this text the supernatural is never given full credence, the importance of the child's belief is. The central point in any such text is that a belief in their own imaginings allows children to overcome the handicap of adult doubt. Nevertheless, it should be noted that *A Grass Rope*, in tending to stand outside these imaginings and dissert upon them rather than directly involving the reader, although thereby arguably more realistic, presents a treatment of the narrative that is not often seen. One is not surprised to learn that, for John Rowe Townsend, early Mayne, though well-written, lacks "a vital

element – a sense of emotional involvement" (*Written for Children*, p.250). Certainly Mayne's later and more often discussed novel, *Earthfasts*, is markedly more child-centred in its unbroken complicity with the child's perception of the fantastic recurrence of the past.

In any case, the archaeological story is felt to tap into a deep feeling for the past as perceived through its material remains.

What child has not tried to bring the past to life, or wished desperately that some talisman – an ancient stone, an arrowhead – would unlock the door to vanished worlds?

(Landsberg, p.167)

One is certainly not to trace this desire to whatever texts the child has read; such a sense is apparently the birth right of *any* child, a natural stage in its development. The archaeological artefact is its objective correlative. Yet it is not, for all that, a mere symbol. For Townsend, Lurie, Pearce and Swinfen, critics and authors alike, the supernatural element of these texts is the expression of something "hidden, but there forever" (Swindells, *A Serpent's Tooth*, p.39) behind or beneath the concrete surface of the world, the spiritually alive past encased within the material, and therefore, conceivably, within the real. It is at once unequivocally "there" and also hidden, and therefore in need of discovery. The discovery may occasion a sort of surprise, but one whose content is pre-ordained and circumscribed by the object or place's past. It is this which characterises "archaeology" in kiddie-lit rather than any rigorous attention to the academic discipline of that name. Just as the artefact itself lies under the ground, waiting to be dug out, so meaning is seen as being contained within objects, and interpretation is merely the

process of extracting what is *already there*. The children in Alan Garner's *Elidor* (or at least, Roland, the youngest and most receptive) sense the eternal essence of their relics.

'The Treasures still feel their own shapes when you hold them. They only look like scrap.'

(Garner, *Elidor*, p.64)

I may seem to exaggerate when I attribute to this innocent play with magic, adult ideologies of essence and presence. Yet, this is the explanation offered through the mouths of the children themselves.

'The real sword and these two bits of wood have the same kind of "swordness" about them.'

(Garner, *Elidor*, p.132)

Repeatedly, what might be put down to mere antiquarian curiosity is given full credence as authentic insight into to some past time.

"I love old objects. I love to feel the past in my palm. I *know* that a man wore that helmet six and a half centuries ago!"

(Scott, *The Haunted Sand*, p.26)

This knowledge might, of course, be nothing more than a figure of speech. Further investigation, however, suggests a rather more literal interpretation.

"My fingers could taste the leather that was no longer there! And when I held it, I felt its whole shape, and knew the living head it encased. I knew the sword stroke

that ended the terror of its owner. The greed in his soul; the cold damp of a summer long ago, and death in every breath of air."

(Scott, *The Haunted Sand*, p.27)

Attendant on this there may be a strong feeling that resulting events are fated or inevitable; the object, acting as a trigger, retells its history through present individuals. The workings of this fate are so vast and beyond our imagining as to be inscrutable. It is down to these individuals to work out their role and play it to the hilt, not to question why they are there at all.

'It's as if everything that's ever happened was leading up to this,' said Roland. 'You can't say how far back it started: everything working together: like cog wheels. When I spun the street names they had to stop at that one place.'

(Garner, *Elidor*, p.46)

The writers of archaeological stories from the 1960s to the present would seem to be in the thrall of a similar inexorable destiny. For in the measure that, in these fictions, historical dramas are perpetually *there*, waiting to be played out and resolved in the present, so for their authors are they eternally there, waiting to be written.

The above survey stitches together from diverse texts something that may be called a *narrative* in a sense more specific than that of being a popular story-line. To be precise, I am dealing with a group of texts from a particular period which bear remarkable similarities, but which are not thought of as constituting a genre. Rather, they are thought of as owing their coherence as a group to some diffuse tradition; optional, but highly recommended, is the idea that this may even reflect a very literal truth.



In short, I have not really ventured beyond the child literary institution's own self-definition, whose only imagined outside influence in this matter is apparently the past itself. Though the texts themselves will need more detailed consideration, to establish their coherence as a group, it will first be necessary to restore to them a whole lost heritage, which they have hitherto mysteriously failed to divine. This will involve us not in the "past", but in history, or to be more precise, historiography.

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The idea of local history attracts a good deal of attention in post-war pedagogy. This attraction springs from its suitability as a vehicle for the synthesis of child-centred, activity, and developmental theories in the junior school.

This trend has been further encouraged by the increasing emphasis which educationists have laid on the importance of interpreting the environment to the boys and girls who are growing up in it. Consequently, books and articles published since the war constantly refer to the value of local history.<sup>12</sup>

This pedagogical development runs parallel with, or perhaps a little before, the fictions with which I am concerned, and furthermore resembles them somewhat, both in its approach to the past through the concrete, and in its paedocentric aims. Firstly, local history accommodates the activity-based model of child as explorer/detective.

Pioneers of the emerging junior school emphasised the vital rôles that activity and the exploration of their immediate environment must play in the education of young children.

(Douch, pp.3-4)

What better vehicle than via local history? The case may equally be put the other way round; study and play centred on the environment may be seen as a vehicle for the teaching of history.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Douch, *Local History and the Teacher* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp.4-5.

The awakening of historical curiosity has also been among the aims of the experiments made by some junior school teachers who have centred their work on the children's immediate environment. A "get to know your own neighbourhood" scheme is in line with the interests of older juniors in exploration and investigation.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, in these pedagogical texts, the exploration of the environment and the discovery of its *past* are so closely identified as to be almost synonymous. In any case, it is the immediacy of the "environment" that recommends this course of study. It will act as a ready-made text waiting to be interpreted, one that will allow the teacher to remain in the background. Apparently history has been taught too much as "the delivery of ready packaged goods. Children need to work on their own more". Meanwhile, the teacher will prod discreetly.

They can be encouraged to be curious, to observe patiently and accurately, to concentrate, to ask questions, to collect, to classify, and, where appropriate, to see relationships.

(Douch, p.8)

These aims and methods will be familiar from my previous discussion of child-centred theories. Douch seems not so much a proselyte of these theories, as caught up in the steady flow of their assimilation into normal practice. Thus his views are tempered by a degree of caution, and he suggests that the teacher, ideally,

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<sup>13</sup> *Teaching History*, Ministry of Education Pamphlet no. 23, (London, 1952), p.23.

striking a careful balance between under and over direction, is unobtrusively guiding the broad lines of their enquiry.

(Douch, p.128)

Nevertheless, the fact that the child will study his concrete surroundings rather than a text-book seems to afford a degree of freedom. Indeed, the naturally available text may even counter, replace, or correct the printed word.

Junior children's attention is sensuous rather than intellectual, and is directed to objects rather than to ideas and beliefs.<sup>14</sup>

It is for this very reason that one is advised to make "every possible use of the environment of the pupil" and "activity methods" (Strong, p.14). This version of local history has thus strong links with the sort of landscape history popularised by William Hoskins.

One cannot write books on this subject by reading someone else's books, or even by studying records in a muniment room. The English landscape itself, to those who know how to read it aright, is the richest historical record we possess. There are discoveries to be made in it for which no written documents exist, or have ever existed.

(Hoskins, p.14)

The landscape is thus proposed as a new sort of text, one that exists apart from, even in opposition to, the printed word. Hence, for school

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<sup>14</sup> C.F. Strong, *History in the Primary School* (London: University of London Press, 1950), p.13.

local history also, the mute but suggestive objects that compose and litter the landscape are our principle text.

The fragility and the durability of crockery which makes of a refuse heap a mine of information, or that discoloration of the soil which reveals a hearth thousands of years old – these have an irresistible appeal to the boy, or man, who enjoys Sherlock Holmes and his successors.

*(Teaching History, p.52)*

I do not wish to suggest that there is something inherently suspect in a fascination for objects. Nor would I necessarily cast doubt on the idea that such a fascination may play a part in interesting children in history. The object, however, becomes problematic when its surface glamour is equated with some depth, when it is seen as containing self-evident meaning, or telling its own story. When the object ventriloquises other subjects, it is even more so.

Tangible remains of this local history often survive – a burial mound, a document, a town wall, a tradesman's token, a dress – and it is this which underlines the reality, arouses imaginative sympathy, and facilitates comprehension.

*(Douch, p.9)*

Here "imaginative sympathy" is the key; it seems some person or voice is imagined behind the object. Since the burial mound, token or broken china are all mute objects, they cannot of course "tell" anything unless they are paraphrased through the medium of the child-detective. Their "stories" can surely only be made of texts that have already been poured into the object by the sympathies of the child, perhaps with the aid of a friendly teacher. So surely history – a narrative – no matter how

skilfully it is decanted into an artefact, cannot escape its textual origins and destination. Hoskins, however inadvertently, admits as much.

One cannot understand the English landscape and enjoy it to the full, apprehend all its wonderful variety from region to region (often within the space of a few miles), without going back to the history that lies behind it.

(Hoskins, p.13)

For, one remembers, to interpret the objective information contained in the landscape, one has to know how to "read it aright", as Hoskins so pithily puts it. Some previous knowledge of the "history that lies behind it" must, of course, intrude, and this, surely, must come from text. School local history, nevertheless reserves for text a scepticism by which it remains remarkably untroubled in relation to the *soi disant* objective world. So, for instance, according to Douch, the child will learn

to appreciate the limitations of so-called evidence, and to see how history comes to be written.

(Douch, p.9)

In itself, such scepticism seems admirable. The immediacy of the local terrain, however, assures us that there is "a reality and obvious significance about local history" (Douch, p.7). It can thus bring the past to life in a way that history books alone cannot. Apparently, then, distance in time is to be traversed or abolished by physical proximity. For seemingly what is being claimed is that to have an object or landscape to hand is to understand its *past*. The artefact, although plainly another sort of evidence, is endowed with self-evident "significance" determined by that past, an aura or echo that will encourage belief. Thus Douch invokes

the same notion of archaeology that Townsend and Lurie find in kiddie-lit; the objective world is a privileged site of meaning, endowed with a measure of autonomy from verbal discourse.

This manoeuvre is, of course, largely motivated by the paedocentric opposition of community to lonely, alienated scholarship.

The academic tradition, which is still so potent, tends to blind us to the need of relating the work of the schools to the life of the community.

(Strong, p.15)

One might say, then, that local history provides a particularly apt romance of the classroom, imagined beyond its physical bounds, and utterly beyond the bounds of academia/text. The child is to enter into, or even create, a new relationship with his world. Douch suggests that the pursuit of local history will strengthen the child's relations with others. Kids will develop "closer contacts with parents". This in turn will "break down barriers between school and the world." The child will thus gain a "wider appreciation of the interdependence of members of a community" (Douch, p.7). Furthermore, a teacher's competence is "dependent upon his remaining in the neighbourhood for some years" (Douch, p.10). It would seem that this is not so much a subject in the school curriculum as a way of life, and one which is, besides, itself *local*.

Such a notion of community is profoundly organic, and as such it is felt to be compromised by Modernity. In the early years of this century, John Dewey could still consider the globe as an extended analogy of the small, self-contained community.

But when familiar fences that mark the limits of the village [...] are signs that introduce an understanding of the boundaries of great nations, even fences are lighted with meaning.

(Dewey, p.249)

By 1939, however, this has all gone.

In the small communities of former times the child was socialised through his daily experience; he knew how miller, weaver, tailor and carpenter supplied his needs; he knew where his food came from; he could grasp the simple structure of society, and realise his own place in it. But these experiences have been withdrawn from the child.

(Smith and Harrison, *Principles of Class Teaching*, p.9)

Yet it is something resembling this old order that local history seems to want to revivify. Perhaps this is the true sense in which the child will rediscover the past. Quite apart from any information he may discover along the way, he will, almost inadvertently, recreate what was best in history, a unified society characterised by direct, strongly-felt bonds of community, the world we have lost.

Here, local history runs into some serious problems. For its complaint, that "too much school history bears no relationship to the world in which pupils will live" (Douch, p.9), may just rebound on the proposed alternatives. In spite of its universalising claim – that the past, all our pasts, axiomatically lies all around us – where the traces of each successive epoch are *not* readily accessible by the rambling archaeological gaze, there is a problem. At this point it is admitted that some geographical areas are less richly endowed in this respect than others.



Here the universality and self-evidence of both locale and object-as-sign fall apart.

Most schools in the middle of new housing estates are obviously poorly placed compared with those in the heart of York or Winchester.

(Douch, p.10)

A new charge is added to the list of the housing estate's crime; it cannot be read according to the archaeological method. Winchester on the other hand is, according to archaeologist David Wilson, "right at the core of English history".<sup>15</sup> This last quotation is taken from a passage devoted to the rise of rescue archaeology (i.e. digging amongst the foundations of developments under construction), which is, in "helping the cause of history [...] one of the most exciting and expanding features of the discipline" (Wilson, p.325). In this new (in the sixties) meeting of disciplines (adumbrated in the rebuilding-leads-to-ghostly-happenings narratives of *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe*, *A Pattern of Roses*, *The Moon of Gomrath*) a town like Winchester is central, though not in simple geographical terms. A landscape of *value* is mapped out, with regions of greater or lesser historical interest, according to one's method of reading history.

There is a certain inevitability in this, but it is one that only serves to reveal local history's abjection in the presence of the antique object, redeemer of the organic past. For if the still visible signs of the past are to be our document of choice, then a Winchester clearly beats a Milton Keynes. Nevertheless, all is not lost; a compromise can be reached. For,

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<sup>15</sup> David Wilson, *Atoms of Time Past* (London: Scientific Book Club, 1976), p.325.

as *Teaching History* suggests, "local" colour can always be *imported* into historically challenged areas; mere tangibility is offered as a consolation prize for the lack of heritage of a genuinely *local* provenance.

Some schools less fortunately situated [i.e. without a Roman camp in the area] may yet have a museum within easy reach where perhaps children can not only see but handle and draw the Roman lamp, the horn book, the tinder box or the nineteenth century doll's house [...]. All these can so easily become talismans to conjure up the past.

(*Teaching History*, p.52)

Seemingly a knowledge of the locale as it actually exists is less important than that kids get to touch some old things. What is being said here? It would surely be preposterous to claim that some areas are any less a product of History than others, just because they do not sport sufficiently fashionable accessories. This is especially so if these accessories have no more specific function than to act as trinkets with which to conjure. This version of local history, far from being democratic or universalising, is intensely parochial and snobbish. It quite simply prefers some areas of history (hence of land and value) to others. Those places which provide a gratifying display of organic continuity, etched into the landscape as a record of graceful change, are especially welcome.

My account of this matter tends necessarily to elide the possible utility of such methods in interesting bored classes in a subject that could appear rather dry, but which is nevertheless important. These purely pedagogical aims remain beyond the scope of my thesis. What rather interests me is the tendency of the rhetoric of these pedagogues towards a very particular notion of history. For these texts, designed to be read as

hints for the classroom, also seem at times to aspire to the condition of fiction. Thus one may even find the pedagogue openly envious of writers for children who

take their readers back into the past, not by a tortuous path of logical connexions and rarely by the association of past and present; their open sesame is sheer magic, the flight of the carpet, the twist of the ring, the standing within the charmed circle. Are they perhaps wiser in this than we at school?

(*Teaching History*, p.19)

"Wisdom", it should be noted, is often used in this way to denote one's preferred brand of ignorance. One might begin to wonder how far this sort of history – intuitive, averse to analysis, shamanistic almost – seriously merits the title. As a description of *historical fiction*, on the other hand, it would be quite unexceptionable. It is one with which Sir John Marriott, a proper, grown-up historian, would basically agree.

This book is confessedly an adventure. If it can be objected that adventure is the exclusive privilege, the peculiar province of youth, the obvious retort is that adventure is the best specific against the insidious infection of old age, and offers the liveliest hope of preserving in some measure the dew of one's youth.<sup>16</sup>

Marriott, in effect, is a historian on a busman's holiday in the remote province of childhood, in the land of fiction. He does not quite relinquish the academic specificity of his knowledge, for he brings with him the authority of an academic historian. Nevertheless, Marriott is

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<sup>16</sup> Sir John Marriott, *English History in English Fiction* (London: Blackie, 1940), p.v.

thoroughly enjoying what he sees as the prime facilities offered by his host discipline. One such is the personal point of view afforded by fiction.

The historian deals with facts in the general; the novelist must illustrate their reaction upon individuals.

(Marriott, p.256)

Fiction has thus the ability to give to history "a real, living and human interest" (Marriott, p.256), which has a rejuvenating effect. School local history, as described above, seems to have a similar aim; to put the *story* back into history. Even more specifically, generically speaking, it will make it into an adventure. So, child and teacher will "become active participants in a common voyage of discovery" (Strong, p.5). That is to say, they will both be absorbed in the same story, such that the teacher will not be seen as author. The adventure metaphor is common to paedocentric rhetoric, but here it is rather more strongly motivated than is usual, having at the back of its mind a fiction that is *generically* adventurous. It is in this spirit that Strong suggests introducing history to younger juniors through fairy tales. This turns out to be another way of running the gauntlet of urbanisation to link children to the rural past.

It is true that most of these tales belong to a *milieu* which is long extinct and that children herded together in the present urban agglomerations of our society are less likely to see them as anything but stories than are children in rural areas. But the teacher who is a real story-teller may have tried to recapture something of the spirit of that dead past for the children by suitable activities arising out of the stories and related to the children's everyday lives.

(Strong, pp.25-6)

It will be noted that it is paradoxically by an intensification of the fictional effort on the part of the teacher that greater historical truth can be attained. As these stories themselves form a "part of the fabric of our society" (Strong, p.25), they are also part of the "dead" past whose "spirit" must be invoked. Thus, history, the rural locale, activity methods and "the great storehouse of literature" (Strong, p.27) form part of a coherent plan, not just to study the past, but to drag selected extracts into the present.

Even the relatively sober Dewey, who considers that history without its necessary complement, geography, "becomes a literary phantasy – for in purely literary history the natural environment is but stage scenery" (Dewey, p.248), can see a place for a sense of adventure.

Geography is a topic that originally appeals to imagination – even to the romantic imagination. It shares in the wonder and glory that attach to adventure, travel, and exploration.

(Dewey, p.248)

Dewey seems, quite reasonably, to want to keep the imaginative merely instrumental; one can use the notion of adventure, but should not become enslaved to it. Sadly, he has not foreseen the emotive power of the rhetoric of adventure, and the homology between a certain description of educational practice and the fictions that this makes possible. The fictions with which I am particularly concerned here seem indeed to take pedagogy up on its offer, providing a remarkably complete fictional performance of its ideas.

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If kiddie-lit does owe a debt to pedagogy in this matter, it is not especially keen to avow it. One occasionally glimpses a slice of rhetoric that would seem to come direct from the mouth of paedocentrism. Thus, for example, a tutor in disguise offers friendly advice to one of her charges.

Dr Maud grinned at Ida. 'I hope your voyage of discovery discovered something. They don't always, you know.'

(Boston, *The River at Green Knowe*, p.87)

The appearance of the stock child-centred "voyage of discovery" metaphor could, of course, be purely coincidental and, even supposing, as seems likely, that it were consciously motivated by paedocentrism, this would be a rare exception. One would, nevertheless, be quite wrong to imagine that these archaeological stories are simply indifferent to pedagogy. Kiddie-lit's archaeological heroes often have an uneasy relationship with school history.

Roland tried to concentrate on his history book. He had to read twenty pages, and he found that he was more aware of the number of a page than of what was printed on it.

(Garner, *Elidor*, p.87)

School and books are clearly letting Roland down, for his adventures in *Elidor* prove him a child of prodigious "historical" sensibility. It might be objected that what is represented is simply the child's natural aversion to school books. But there is a consistent thread of thought in these archaeological narratives that worships the

*experiential* at the expense of *text*, one that is clearly in line with the organicist tendency previously discussed. Another such criticism of the writing of history may be found in *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe*. James tries to find out about his new home, but finds the library a dead end.

There were two or three histories of Ledsham, but none were very helpful, dealing as they did mainly with the decline and fall of the Abbey [...].

(Lively, *Thomas Kempe*, p.50)

This is of no use to the child; "the Abbey" as an institution, the focal point of various economical, religious and political forces lacks personality and physical presence, and is therefore beside the point. In the same way, even the sort of document which one could initially assume to be the staple of local history may prove inadequate. One of Alan Garner's child heroes discovers an old parish ledger, which initially fascinates him.

He treasured the book as a link with a time that had passed. But Colin was fascinated by the anecdotes, details of court leets, surveys of the parish, manorial grants, and family histories that filled the book.

(Garner, *Gomrath*, p.34)

In the end, however, it is precisely the book's inadequacy that means the child has to go further.

The dry scholarship of the rector's notes seemed so removed from the excitement of magic that he began to doubt.

(Garner, *Gomrath*, p.53)

The child is subsequently bathed in magic and has no further need of the text. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the book, if sufficiently old, may itself be endowed with a certain measure of glamour. Reading may, under certain circumstances, be part of the adventure. Thus a child who descends into the dungeon-like cellar of a local newspaper is doing something more than mere reading.

If I ever get out of this, she thought, *if* I ever get out of this, I shall never open up a history-book again. History in books is a lie. Reading about Castlereagh and Wellington is a lie; because what you read is printed on nice clean shiny new paper. *Real* history is damp and dust and cobwebs and dead people who won't lie down.  
(Westall, *The Watch House*, p.133)

The "damp and dust and cobwebs" of history are tangibly present in the cellar, as are the dead. For here is "The Tutankhamun's Tomb of the Thomson Newspaper chain", where back numbers are stored in "coffins" (p.132). Digging through newspapers yellowed with age, one returns to source, not so much by reading the original document as by *feeling* its age. Consequently, academic research or the school book are of no interest to the child, for the personal, magical feel that will reveal the past is not to be found therein. The degree of suspicion of text is thus variable and conditional. The essential point is that these archaeological activities are autonomous from mundane academic schooling.

"Yes," said Mother. "I know children who are loners because they are too bright or because their cleverness lies in a non-academic direction. They're simply not interested in the school's curriculum. They want to know about, well, archaeology, for example."

(Scott, *The Haunted Sand*, p.68)



There is no "well...for example" about it; archaeology is the very type of an interest that grabs the imagination of that child for whom a dry, academic, text-based education is anathema. Yet even *archaeology*, as practised by professors, may be something of a let down.

Finally they ended up at the field just beyond the outskirts of the village where some archaeologists were excavating a Bronze Age settlement. It wasn't very interesting [...].

(Lively, *Thomas Kempe*, p.36)

In spite of his own excavatory fervour, James has no time for the dry precision of the academic. It is his own digging in a rubbish heap that will give him the information he wants, self-sufficient and free of academe.

After an hour or so he had unearthed a whole sequence of domestic breakages, from eighteenth-century wine-bottles through flowery Victorian cups to twentieth-century Woolworth's blue and white china. The bones, too, would need to be classified [...].

(*Thomas Kempe*, p.27)

Indeed, all of James's discoveries necessitate a return to the rubbish heap.

James had the impression that the further he investigated, the further he was going back in time.

(*Thomas Kempe*, p.100)

Clearly he is making progress; starting from mere pottering, he has developed a veritable historical sense. He has always been fascinated by old things. The urge to order/categorise, that is to name, has already been suggested by the shelves in his room "where James kept his books, his fossil collection, his shells, and various other things" (pp.20-21). This pursuit has at first suggested

a small exhibition to be called 'Three Hundred Years of Domestic Life in an Oxfordshire Cottage.'

(*Thomas Kempe*, p.30)

This imitation adult approach, however, has been swept aside by direct contact with the past, and his fascination for material artefacts rechannelled. This he has done for himself, from scratch. Thus *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe* can quite easily be read as a paean to the child's uncluttered intuition, with bumbling adult pedantry as a comic foil. A critic such as Michele Landsberg, in articulating this discovery, recapitulates at some length the narrative of wise child and foolish adult.

[James] is brought into contact with all the townspeople who are, one way or another, trying to delve into the past – and mostly getting it all wrong. The archaeologists busily digging on the town outskirts are oblivious to the real ghost of the past that accompanies James; the teacher, self-satisfiedly lecturing the class on the gullibility of their forebears who invented witchcraft as an explanation for the inexplicable, falls smack into the opposite fallacy right in the middle of his lecture [...].

(Landsberg, p.171-172)

Such a naive and direct recapitulation of the book's own moral is indeed convenient. For it illustrates very nicely the scorn towards school history that is consistently found in the archaeological story. The history teacher, it would seem, is completely ignorant of, or indifferent to, the ready-made resources that lie all around him. Here, for instance is the unofficial curator of an impromptu museum of coast guard and seafaring memorabilia – more precisely, a collection of junk in a shed.

"Aah keep writing to headmasters, asking them to send classes down. But they don't seem over-interested."

(Westall, *The Watch House*, p.22)

What is remarkable in this is the complete silence on the matter of this very attitude's own counterpart in *pedagogy*. The archaeological tale may appear to be a sort of extended advert for local history methods, yet at the same time it seems to want to keep all the glory for fiction, that is for fiction's ability to promote the idea disinterestedly, with complete autonomy, without the appearance of any pedagogic allegiance whatsoever.

There is perhaps something rather ungrateful in this. For if kiddie-lit has managed to steal a march on pedagogy and make this approach to history its own, this is not least due to the prior fictional leanings of the theory. Yet, in as far as the method is reliant on evoking an empathetic response to the bygone life of ancient artefacts, children's authors have a great advantage over their pedagogic peers, in that they can flesh out this personalisation through character. This can mean, literally, a person, or it can work through the personification of the objects themselves. Thus a time-travelling boat becomes a quasi-person, endowed with memory.

'Perhaps she can go back to anytime she's known.'<sup>17</sup>

Voices and lives cling to their former haunts and inform our present.

The church was very dark and quiet now, but not empty because no place that has been used for so long by so many people can ever be empty. Like all old buildings, it was full of their thoughts and feelings [...].

(Lively, *Thomas Kempe*, p.154)

The curious child has only to look at a maypole to sense the history it contains.

It had been there centuries, she thought, and knew a thousand secrets.

(Cresswell, *Polly Flint*, p.43)

Such monuments, though generally taciturn in the presence of adults, forget nothing, and thus hold a great untapped stock of history.

It was like a smaller Shuttlingslow -- or a tumulus. It had the tumulus's air of mystery; it was subtly different from the surrounding country; it *knew* more than the fields in which it had its roots.

(Garner, *Brisingamen*, p.173)

For the child, other presences are constantly there, waiting for a sympathetic audience. Such an audience can only be the child, who is

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Westall, *The Wind Eye* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p.65.

presumed to be unprejudiced and therefore open to phenomena such as "that feeling in empty houses that if you think nobody lives there *you are wrong* " (Boston, *The River at Greene Knowe*, p.31). Thus, whereas the poor history teacher can only try to rouse the "sympathetic imagination", the kiddie-lit author may have the ancient talisman speak directly to the child.

"The metal speaks to me! It speaks to *me*, Darren Wycroft."

(Scott, *The Haunted Sand*, p.27)

What is more, it may even speak *through* the child, the ideal receptor for historical possession.

The voice lightened. The words rang in a clear breath across the room, and the hair on Frisby's neck prickled, for they were not Darren's words, but memories plucked from the helmet.

(Scott, *The Haunted Sand*, p.137)

Here, let us note a further advantage of the author of fiction over the teacher or pedagogue. For fiction is happily liberated from the necessity of teaching history, that is to say, an examinable subject. It may do so *incidentally*, by incorporating accurate period detail, but this is not essentially its aim. Rather it affirms a historical, an archaeological, *sense* with which the child is gifted, and which gains access to the past in moments of intense recognition without any need for teaching.

The adult, on the other hand, is thoroughly encumbered by his specific knowledge. Thus the child may even be the only fit custodian of the artefact as the grown-ups, paralysed by their academicism, are unable

to see the true force of the object. In adult hands, even the romance-filled grail may be reduced to an ancient goblet of uncertain origin.

'They all seem to treat it as a kind of relic,' Jane said sadly.

(Cooper, *Over Sea, Under Stone*, p.220)

For the source of adventure is now imprisoned in a glass case, removed from the circuit of history in which it lived and breathed. Peasants also take a dim view of all this academic circumlocution.

'Tek them. Tek them and leave us be. Tek them back to your bliddy posh college and put them in a glass case and write your bliddy rubbish about them.'

(Westall, *The Wind Eye*, p.112)

The academic approach fails precisely by refusing to see the presences which, for the child, and his analogue the peasant, provide a deeper, more personal insight into the object and its history. Thus, to the question, should a grave be dug up, the academic responds, *sang-froid*.

'Far as I'm concerned, it's a Middle Bronze Age primary cremation burial, with bucket urn and cremated bones.'

(Lively, *Thomas Kempe*, p.131)

This represents an attitude quite different to that of the child who pauses "with a feeling of intrusion" (*Thomas Kempe*, p.100) before reading old letters found in a rubbish heap. It is this personal perspective that underpins the aversion to the scientific already discussed in *The Revenge of Samuel Stokes*.

As Grandpa says, it's a question of personality and temperament, and feelings, and such things haven't got much time for the scientific approach.

(*Lively, Samuel Stokes*, p.138)

It is this element of the past that the professor who attempts to explain the recurrence of Stokes's garden by mass hysteria kills by making "a sort of chart with much fancy mathematical stuff and some improbable language" (*Lively, Samuel Stokes*, p.33). Indeed, the whole of this book is presented as a counter to the tendency represented by such a fatuous pedant.

So this book is to put the professor in his place and tell the story as it happened.

(*Lively, Samuel Stokes*, p.7)

For kiddie-lit, as for the pedagogue, local history leads the child away from the arid boredom and precision of academic, textual research, and into the magical, where we are assured it will achieve something that no number of men in suits, heads jammed with dry abstractions could imagine. It is not so much that the child needs history, as that history needs the child; history (the academic discipline) must go out and look with fresh eyes, unclouded by text. The learned gentleman of E. Nesbit's influential *The Story of the Amulet* is a sort of prototype of a figure common to kiddie-lit since the 1950s; the knowledgeable adult whose enlightenment is nevertheless dependent on the magic of the child.

'The dear children! It must be their affection that has given me these luminous *aperçus*. I seem to see so many things now – things I never saw before!'

(*Amulet*, p.281)

Indeed; the children, using their magic amulet, have taken him to Atlantis, Ancient Egypt and so on, but his adult apostasy has left him unable to give full credit to his memories. So he can only explain the knowledge gained on his trips in the above fashion. We, being on the side of the children, know better. Thus also when Maud Biggin, the professional archaeologist in Lucy M. Boston's *The River at Green Knowe*, cannot see a giant even when the children show it to her, the giant itself has already given the explanation.

'I see them rushing about, but they never seem to look higher than their own shoulders. Except boys. Boys are always best.'

(*The River at Green Knowe*, p.74)

Maud's professional archaeology means that she never looks ahead at all.

If not reading, her attention was on the ground as if expecting that something very interesting might catch her eye there. She had spent much of her life digging up old cities and graves in deserts and shaly hillsides, and had got into the habit of searching the ground for fragments. She could not bear a vacuum cleaner because it left her nothing to look at.

(*The River at Green Knowe*, p.5)

Thus, the children have to plant a genuine giant's tooth in her path before she will see it. Even then, her colleagues refuse to believe in its authenticity, as it is "just a little ahead of the evidence" (p.98). The irony is, of course, that she owes her own discovery to the kids, and its rejection to adult unbelief from which she is not entirely exempt herself.



Fortunate, then, is the history professor who is led by his children's adventures to renounce academia and pursue his family heritage. The initial clue may be textual – a mention in the 'Chronicles of Symeon' of a servant of St Cuthbert whose name resembles his own. The path it suggests, however, is precisely *not* further academic research.

Stitheard.

Studdard.

There had to be a connection! The clue to everything that had happened lay there, if only he could find it.

There was only one way to find it. Resign his fellowship. Come to live at Monk's Heugh permanently. Comb the shores for evidence of Cuddy; collect and study every object he found. Sail *Resurre* winter and summer; and someday, somehow, slip through the time-curtain again and meet Cuddy face-to-face and never return to the dry-as-dust twentieth century.

Then he gasped. That was exactly what Uncle Henry had done before him...and Uncle Henry's father before that. Studdards back to the dawn of time. Living in Monk's Heugh, guarding *Resurre*.

(Westall, *The Wind Eye*, pp.156-7)

This quotation illustrates almost too many inter-related ideas at once. An intense personal experience (meeting St Cuthbert via the time-travelling boat *Resurre*) leads to academic apostasy, which in turn leads to an alternative historiography, the reading of objects as clues. These clues are themselves animated by a double personal interest; not only the presence of past consciousnesses, but the possibility of direct descent from the original players. Even the resulting research forms a part of the family heritage; he gasps with surprise, but all he has discovered is the tradition to which he already belongs. Professor Studdard thus not only

seeks organic continuity, his very search creates it. This happy accident, coming out of engaging, exciting adventures realistically recounted, resembles what one imagines to be the pedagogue's wildest dreams.

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Local history's claims to reforge a community lost at some unspecified point in the past should be remembered here. For if Studdard is going to find his roots, his true place in the world, he will do so by renouncing his existing position, fleeing to a remote seaside town, and communing with the concrete traces of persons deceased. The archaeological tale often follows this seemingly perverse course; personal fulfilment proceeds from alienation from one's present-day entourage. This may seem to render a rather bizarre notion of community, yet it is not one that troubles those in the field. Critics are often glad to discover an element of isolation from the actual in these books. Thus, as Michele Landsberg notes approvingly of *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe*, "to James, Arnold and his dog become even more real than his own doubting friends" (Landsberg, p.172).

The historical *semblable*, Arnold, seems to stand in the place of a lonely child's imaginary friend, yet far from being merely consolatory, this relation is presented as almost preferable to those with living contemporaries. James flirts with a real peer friendship but, as the ghost chase gathers pace, this fizzles out, as if surplus to requirements. At this point, Bert the tutor disguised as bluff workman takes over in helping to lay the ghost to rest. The really important relationship, however, *is* with Arnold, "a friendship" which "did not feel entirely one-sided" (*Thomas Kempe*, p.112).

Although such ghostly friends are beings present only through their material leavings, existentially, if you like, they belong to that elusive complementary strand of reality that is more real. Conversely, purely

*modern* objective reality becomes less substantial, devalued by the accumulated power of the past.

Front Street, full of shoppers and red double-decker buses, was insubstantial, like a dream. It was the real world that was ghostly now.

(Westall, *The Watch House*, p.131)

Such experiences tend to coincide with periods of silence and withdrawal. The sensitive withdrawn child, for whom "silence had become a habit"<sup>18</sup>, may find in a ghost an almost overwhelming alternative reality.

It seemed to be having some difficulty in seeing Barney so that he felt that *he* might be the one who was not quite real.

(Mahy, *The Haunting*, p.2)

Isolation may indeed be the very thing that makes this attention to an alternative reality emanating from the past possible for the child.

In Penelope Lively's *A Stitch in Time* (1976), Maria is a solitary, imaginative child who doesn't talk to other people much, but has conversations with animals, plants and petrol pumps. She is just the person to hear sounds that seem to come from the past [...].

(Townsend, *Written for Children*, p.237)

Even in company, silence is golden. It is no bad thing that the heroes of *The River at Green Knowe* "were not a talkative trio" (Boston,

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<sup>18</sup> Margaret Mahy, *The Haunting* (London:Mammoth, 1989), p.12.

p.25), so long as the search for the past draws them together as an *audience* for history and nature. For Alison Lurie (and, one presumes, William Mayne, the author she is discussing), this is as it should be.

Even between children real connection is unusual. What matters is not how they feel about each other, but how they feel about themselves and the country or town they live in, or the success of some common enterprise.

(Lurie, 'William Mayne', p.372)

Here, then is the desired form of community. For it is just such a "common enterprise", integrated into the school curriculum, or even better extricated from it, that will offer opportunities "to study real people and situations in depth and detail" (Douch, p.7). The point is that in kiddie-lit the "real people" in question should be first and foremost historical figments; bonding with present-day peers comes after, and through, this – if at all.

For, while it is generally true to say that in these texts the historical other becomes the most important person in the child's life, it is equally true that where present-day chums become important, it is often through their parallels with the past. Thus Rebecca makes an impression on Tim in *A Pattern of Roses* because of her similarity to Netty, the love of his other, Tom. This resemblance has become apparent through comparison with Tom's portrait of Netty, whose discovery has started the whole sequence of events. In this instance, the past is actually *needed* to spark the present into life. Contrary to what one might be forgiven for expecting, it is the present that is dead for Tim (alienated from his ambitious bourgeois parents, lonely in his new home in the country) and the past that re-awakens his interest in life. Indeed, the past *becomes* his

life, both in the sense that Tom, an unseen but felt ghost, is his best friend (as a point of identification) for the duration of the text, and that his choice of career at the end (blacksmith as opposed to advertising agent) leads him back into rural antiquity. In case Tim misses the point of Tom, there is Rebecca there to prompt him, at the book's close; "I think he brought you back to life" (Peyton, p.168).

There is a triangular mediation of personal relations here that places boy and girl side by side admiring the same external object – history/nature. The strategy is uneasy. It is capable, as above, of presenting a hygienic version of romantic relations, just as with Emile, who

even at Sophy's feet [...] cannot help but casting a glance at the country and longing to explore it in her company.

(*Émile*, p.396)

If the common enterprise brings children together, it also holds them at a certain distance. This is nowhere more clear than where the hygienic regime breaks down. A text that famously purports to tackle sex, Garner's *Red Shift*, mediates romance through a shared passion for church architecture. It is when face to face relations become too close – and the sex scene itself is apparently too close even for the text's comfort, as we are allowed to see only its catastrophic aftermath – that things start to fall apart. Jan and Tom's relationship has been, from the start, held together precisely by keeping a hobby- or general knowledge-based distance between them. Their dialogue, which plays a large part in the text, and in establishing their identity as a couple, is a palimpsest of pseudo-science and trivia, laced with a languorous, downbeat angst. These make a

certain claim to a modern ennui, but one tempered by an almost Tennysonian sexual sensibility (admittedly a bizarre combination). Thus Tom, who has just finished pouring dirt over Jan and has "put his head on her shoulder", tells her he loves her. Jan's response is as follows.

'I'm not sure about the mean galactic velocity. We're with M31, M32, M33 and a couple of dozen other galaxies. They're the nearest. What did you say?'<sup>19</sup>

Here scientific pedantry is clearly used as a distancing tool. Conversely, when Jan has told him he frightens her, Tom points to a stone:

'Me too, so shut up and say good-night to our Celtic grand-parent.'

(Garner, *Red Shift*, p.40)

The grandparent in question is a fossil, the naturally-occurring talisman that can take them out of their tortured present and restore calm. This is because, like the ancient axehead they find later on, it is "a real thing" (p.84). The reality in question is quite different from the modern "ultimate reality" of a supermarket where, as Tom wryly notes, "It's all so real, we're shadows" (p.67). So when Tom asks, "Are people more important than things?" (p.100), the implicit answer is; it depends which things you mean. In the city, identity and a sense of personal worth are obscured. The "lovers" have to go deep into the country, to Barthomley, to recover themselves.

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<sup>19</sup> Alan Garner, *Red Shift* (London: Collins, 1973), p.8.

'This is us,' said Tom. 'This is honest. Down there, in that sludge, all the filth, all the problems. We're free of them.'

(*Red Shift*, p.82)

Yet, if they are *free*, in such moments, of the world of modern, alienating objects, they are nevertheless *dependent* on the past. That is to say, the ancient organic landscape acts as a sort of amiable minder that naturally keeps relations well-ordered and manageable, at least until the filth and sludge finally get to Tom.

Where, one might ask, does romance enter into any of this? *Red Shift* is remarkable for introducing sex, but also for its disgusted conviction that it is a doomed enterprise, one that sends Tom mad. Even though Tom and his problems are explained away through his horrifically moralistic/hysterical parents, the abiding conviction of the text seems to be that the kids would have been safer sticking to fossils, preferred elements of the objective world. That this is the choice open to these children is clear from another exchange, on finding the fossil noted above.

'I've always wanted to hold something that matters.'

'Try me,' said Tom.

(*Red Shift*, p.41)

Holding Tom, of course, turns out to be a mistake. It is Jan and Tom's love that leads them to Barthomley, so as to escape the city they are forced to meet in – Crewe of railway junction fame. But this love is the union of their complementary reason/intuition, expressed through their shared historical sense. In other words, it is an archaeological quest, and its proper narrative destination must, in this tainted modern world, be



Barthomley, and not bed. The latter could only be a diversion, and indeed it is one that proves disastrous for Tom's reason.

Garner, in this respect as in many others, represents a rather extreme instance. Nevertheless, he serves to highlight a more general tendency in these fictions. The objective world of the present can be divided into two main categories; that which is purely modern and spurious, and thus alienating, and that which contains its past, and therefore puts one in touch with a more wholesome community. Personal fulfilment is thus primarily dependent on which class of objects one chooses to associate with. The next point that must be considered, then, is how the child is to find its way through the labyrinth of the objective world.

The archaeological adventure appears to the fiction-writer, as to the educationalist, to offer a loose frame within which readers can comprehend their surroundings. In archaeological fiction, the child is forever noting clues to be worked out. So a boy who has met a strange little girl called Jenny in the garden, then discovers that this was his grandmother's name, is apt not to see a coincidence, but rather a pattern.

It was a clue, but there were no easy answers to this puzzle.<sup>20</sup>

The answer is, to the experienced reader of time-slip fiction, not so very difficult; he has indeed encountered his own grandmother as a child. To the sensitive child, the past is constantly sending such messages, cut up parts of a dimly-sensed whole.

He was no longer terrified by these messengers and messages. They were no more than ghostly appearances, to be observed like clues in a mystery story.

(Mahy, *The Haunting*, p.49)

The past is rather coy; it is always trying to tell the child something, maybe even giving her "a message that was intended for her alone",<sup>21</sup> but is never quite explicit. Indeed, it is not the supernatural element that is terrifying, so much as the welter of analogous sign-systems with which the child is faced.

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<sup>20</sup> Alison Prince, *A Haunting Refrain* (London: Methuen, 1989), p.63.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Mahy, *Dangerous Spaces* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), p.24.

'There must be all sorts of clues in the writing, as well as in the drawing. Only they're even more buried and we don't know how to get at them.'

(Cooper, *Over Sea, Under Stone*, p.107)

The object read in the above is a map, a text that coordinates language proper, and signs from other systems. In this example, text is to be rummaged for clues; reading itself becomes a treasure hunt. Conversely, a treasure hunt can be described in terms of reading. Thus, sifting junk in the attic, a child looks for the hidden meaning.

It was like reading the story of somebody's life [...]. All these things had been used once, had been part of every day in the house below.

(Cooper, *Over Sea, Under Stone*, p.29)

Finding such clues is often a matter of scraping away the layers of time that cover the original truth. Thus a group of children literally scrape away the layers of paint on the sign of an inn.

'We might find the clue to the hound business when we've cleaned it up a bit.'

(Mayne, *A Grass Rope*, p.27)

This, however, is not all they will find. For it is thus that one learns to read life itself.

In order to make meaning out of mystery, in order to understand the plot, one has to be able to read the signs [...] just as Laura [in Mahy's *The Changeover*] learns to read the signs of her life [...].<sup>22</sup>

Little wonder, then, that a child drifting down a river, listening to country noises, is convinced that "Everything's trying to say something" (*Boston, River*, p.16), and, diving into the same river, considers it a fair possibility that "We might find Hereward the Wake's dagger" (*Boston, River*, p.21). Best of all, once one has made one's way through these various texts, one may graduate to the mother of them all; the countryside itself.

"The history of the countryside is exposed in these layers of earth, if only I could read them. One day, I will."

(Scott, *The Haunted Sand*, p.54)

This last example is especially important. For it is not quite true to suggest that the field of objects open to such interpretation is limitless. For writers within the field, this is felt to be another organic phenomenon. Each clue, though at first seemingly unrelated, springs out of a whole landscape, that which has informed the story. One such writer, Jane Curry, discussing the work of those fantasists she admires (Boston, Pearce, Mayne, Garner) finds in such writing "a process more intuitive than deductive".<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lissa Paul 'Enigma Variations: What Feminist Theory Knows About Children's Literature', *Children's Literature*, pp.148-163 (p.163) (first publ. in *Signal*, 54 (1987), 186-201).

<sup>23</sup> Jane Curry, 'On the Elvish Craft', in *The Signal Approach*, p.88.

They are tales that can more precisely be said to have grown rather than to have been constructed or made.

(Curry, p.87)

This is so because these writers know that "places hold their pasts within them" (Curry, p.91). These places then speak through their chosen authors. This is a phenomenon that I have already touched on in relation to Jill Paton Walsh's *Goldengrove*; here then we have the method in full. It is one that may be used to forestall a criticism of didacticism.

In case you think it all sounds too earnest and didactic, I will add one thing more:- that basically, fundamentally, and at the beginning of all things, I merely find, or am found by, a story which I want to tell [...].

(Sutcliff, 'History is People', p.312)

Sutcliff, worried that she seems too motivated by the desire to impart "some kind of ethic" (Sutcliff, p.306), hints that she is not the ultimate author of her stories. Curiously enough, one often finds such avowals of an automatic writing that springs from the landscape or the past (which amount to the same thing) *not* apropos of archaeological texts themselves, but of straight historical novels such as those written by Sutcliff - those that plunge the reader directly into a past setting with no recourse to a present-day child mediator.

Walking out over Ashdown Forest with Barbara Willard [...] one truly feels the past is speaking to her.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Moss 'Barbara Willard: The Springs of 'Mantlemass'', *Part of the Pattern*, pp.64-9 (p.69) (first publ. *Signal*, (1972)).

Moss is relating the tale of Willard's own genealogical pursuit of a sixteenth-century namesake who lived in the area she has just moved into. Moss and Willard are both excited by the prospect that the author has found her way home.

So it could be that Barbara Willard had found the mainstream for her creative writing. Ashdown Forest, which possibly bred her – she has yet to discover whether sixteenth-century David Willard is in fact an ancestor – may claim her talents and use them as a channel for revealing itself.

(Moss, *Part of the Pattern*, p.67)

Amongst writers of historical tales the status of medium is apparently cherished. For at least some of these writers, the realm of faery that is the past-in-landscape is indeed part of their everyday reality, and by no means a convenient fictional device. Indeed, the metaphysical landscape is given a seemingly more active role than the writer herself, who will perform the role of ghost-writer for illiterate would-be celebrities such as Ashdown Forest. Willard, in concert with Moss, is recapitulating point for point the narrative of archaeological discovery, but this time as a prehistory of the text itself.

Similarly, Cynthia Harnett (another straight historical novelist) recounts the writing of one of her novels in terms of the archaeological narrative, suggesting an active search, followed by an almost automatic writing, once the clues have been gathered.

Soon it became an enthralling game to watch for landmarks which the children of my architect might have seen on *their* journey from London. Gradually the picture

built itself up. The story began to grow. It was written and sent off, and I looked around for the next.<sup>25</sup>

Once again, we have a story that is – impersonally – “written”. Nevertheless, if Harnett’s writing is passive, then her research is distinctly active. Her original motivation had been a friend’s complaint that so little historical fiction dealt with ordinary folk, something that Harnett notes was

true of historical novels then, [but] is probably less than true now [1961], since social history has become fashionable.

(Harnett, p.97)

Harnett, then, is conscious of currents in historiography, but does not quite implicate herself. In any case, it is her reaction to this stimulus, whatever its source, that is of interest.

It was an idea which meant getting down to the bare ground and scratching about until one found something alive, something that would grow.

(Harnett, p.97)

Harnett’s account is somewhat less ethereal and more social than that of Willard, and she acknowledges her debt to a local historian who has mapped the town in which her fiction is set (Harnett, p.99). Yet her mixture of organic and archaeological metaphor still seems to suggest a

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<sup>25</sup> Cynthia Harnett, ‘From the Ground Upwards’, in *Horn Book Reflections*, pp.97-101 (p.98) (first publ. *Horn Book*, (1961)).

vision of the social as a sort of compost, composed of disparate clues, that one digs up, then leaves to its own devices.

Now there is no yardstick for measuring ordinary people. They must grow, in fiction, as they grow in real life, from their environment; and when it is a question of bringing them out of the past, that environment must be built, stone by stone, from the ground upwards.

(Harnett, p.98)

One might ask in passing, in what precise sense are the family of an architect "ordinary people". The main thing to note, however, is that in spite of apparently rigorous research, one is still left with a story, characters and setting that "grow" and "are written", and that this happens when the jigsaw has been reconstructed, stone by stone.

The novels of Willard, Harnett and Sutcliffe, as I have already noted, differ from the texts I am most concerned with here, in that they visit the past unmediated by present-day child investigators. This, however, would appear to be possible only in as far as the authors have undertaken the necessary investigation themselves. They would seem qualified to do so by virtue of an intimate, rather than a scholarly, knowledge, of their locale. It is thus by no means as a result of some detached study that Willard has also published the *Sussex* volume in the series "Batsford's Britain" (Moss, 'Barbara Willard: The Springs of 'Mantlemass'', p.65); for this is her home.

Barbara Willard is Sussex bred. She was born in Brighton, spent many holidays as a child with relations at Fittleworth, then lived at Kingston, near Lewes, 'right under the Downs' before the opportunity to buy 'Forest Edge' presented itself.



Having bought it she would look out from its leaded windows over the uneven brick path with its giant pots of geranium and begonia, across the sloping lawn surrounded by flowers (she is a keen practical gardener) to the Forest – ‘and positively lust for the distant Downs’.

(Moss, ‘Barbara Willard: The Springs of ‘Mantlemass’’, p.64)

This view from the window is by no means a picturesque detail, but rather the fitting culmination to such a catalogue of a lifetime’s experience of, and devotion to, a place. It is through such windows that local historians often gaze, while writing, masters of all they survey.

The view from this room where I write these last pages is small, but it will serve as an epitome of the gentle unravished English landscape.

(Hoskins, p.233)

The window serves as a vivid and concrete symbol for the interface between the activity of writing and the matter of which one writes. At the same time, it acts as the most inconspicuous – because the most literal and concrete – frame possible, naturally limiting one’s view. It has to be admitted that “not every small view in England is so full of detail as this” (Hoskins, p.234), but if one chooses one’s window with care, there are all sorts of things one will never have to ignore; for they will never have been there in the first place.

From the above, two tendencies may be noted. Firstly, there is an aspiration towards a universally applicable model of reading that can make a nature ramble, a treasure hunt, the reading of a text, or a rendezvous with a ghost, parallel, though delightfully varied, activities, all leading to the same goal – understanding life itself. The second, and

conflicting, trajectory is marked by a constant pull back to the concrete manifestation of the sort of life implicit, and its natural home; the rural scene itself.

It is interesting, then, to consider the case of Penelope Lively, who has written both archaeological kiddie-lit and an introduction to what she calls landscape history. She also glances out of her window for inspiration.

The view from my window, as I write this, is some hundred and forty million years old [...].<sup>26</sup>

Naturally this is so, for

the excitement of landscape history lies in the particular – the narrowing of the focus onto a village, or valley, or farm, the record of change and continuity in one place.

(*The Presence of the Past*, p.7)

That this focus should be narrowed in such a way as to exclude the city seems quite obvious to Lively, for

we share much of the 'romantic' attitude towards landscape which blossomed in the early nineteenth century with Wordsworth and his contemporaries.

(*The Presence of the Past*, p.99)

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<sup>26</sup> Penelope Lively, *The Presence of the Past: An Introduction to Landscape History* (London: Collins, 1976), p.14.

Landscape history starts from this hardy perennial attitude, and proceeds to forge from it a version of history. For apparently this is a sense that we all share. One reason is that cities are a relatively recent innovation.

Perhaps that is why, in all of us, there is a hunger for green fields, even if we never knew them, and why the romantic ideal is still that thatched cottage with roses round the door.

(*The Presence of the Past*, p.114)

This is, however, no mere aesthetic pursuit. For Lively, coming to know the landscape demands a new form of *literacy*. Like Hoskins, Lively tells us that the record of history that resides in the landscape is "disguised as a meaningless view [...] until we learn to learn to look at it" (*The Presence of the Past*, p.9). Interacting sympathetically with one's environment is a detective story; "once you have learned to read it [...] it will tell a story" (p.18). The past "lies like a ghostly jigsaw puzzle under the modern map – a message in code to be deciphered by the ingenuity of today's historians" (p.80). Thus, the fact that "the visible past is not arranged in a tidy sequence, like narrative history" (p.10) is not so much a disadvantage as part of its challenge, and hence its fictive appeal. There is no doubt that a tidy sequence is the desired end, that, moreover, the solution to the puzzle is *there*; a jigsaw is only a mystery when scrambled, for it has only one solution.

One might begin to suspect that this pastime of landscape or local history is none other than a rigorous version of the naming of the wilderness discussed in an earlier chapter. Indeed, it goes somewhat further than this would suggest. For if kiddie-lit wants to include certain

man-made artefacts in the category of the organic, here is a veritable science that will allow it. Landscape history is interested in precisely that nuance of the term organic that includes all that which has lain embedded in, or in close contact with, the good soil for a sufficient length of time to attain planthood. Thus while Lively is in no doubt that "we are an industrial society, and industry creates carnage" (p.212), this condemnation does not cover *all* industry. The Cotswolds wool manufacture, for instance, is a positively good thing precisely because

the industry itself grows so pleasingly out of the natural resources of the place.

(*The Presence of the Past*, p.178)

Similarly, whereas a new town like Cumbernauld (Lively's own example) is – as well as being something of an easy target – an abomination, other towns are rather desirable.

In the end, the most comfortable town is the town that has just grown and that reveals in an unassuming way the layers of time of which it is composed.

(*The Presence of the Past*, p.136)

The "town that has just grown" belongs, of course, to the same forgetful strain of history that imagines sheep bred, and forests razed, for agricultural purposes to be "part of the natural resources of the place", and which gives rise, what is more, to the "book that has just grown". What recommends these strange phenomena is their readability; for they present their clues in "an unassuming way", inviting, though not compelling, us to sift through their "layers" of meaning.

The view from the window, then, discreetly effects a choice of reading matter. If the landscape is text, then we ought to read the right chapters, that is to say, live in the right villages. History as holistic environment is at its best when it provides a text-book recital of the inexorable cavalcade of organic history, as consequential and layered as the village gala float procession. We are thus presented with the paradoxical notion of a holism that exists in isolated pockets.

The text has been primed beforehand to invite a particular answer. Where then does this leave the child's freedom to discover its actual environment? Having been told to distrust books, it has been given a supposedly superior, more complete text, the landscape. Yet from this text, it would appear, several chapters have been excised, indeed far more discreetly than had it been a real book. Are the discarded "chapters" any the less a part of "our history"? This, of course, depends on a certain idea of civilization and history.

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It should by now be clear that archaeological kiddie-lit, like school local history, is steeped in ideas of organic continuity. It is worthwhile, then, asking what roles continuous historiography has played in a wider context, and how these relate to the kiddie-lit version. Foucault has noted that an interdependence of the subjective and the continuous forms a distinct and conservative narrative of history.

Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity [...].

Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are two sides of the same system of thought.<sup>27</sup>

To gloss Foucault somewhat, history is composed of deeds committed in good or bad faith, between which one may choose. All options thus remain eternally available to the enlightened, in a space that massive historical shifts may threaten but never put entirely beyond reach.

Beneath the rapidly changing history of governments, wars, and famines, there emerge other, apparently unmoving histories [...].

(Foucault, *Archaeology*, p.3)

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<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1974), p.12.

Change and rupture are thus not so much denied as viewed with contempt or distaste.

Discontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history.

(Foucault, *Archaeology*, p.8)

What we tend to see, then, is a moralisation of history where we are to be persuaded of the present good by reference to its continuity with the past. The converse also holds; that of which one disapproves may be put down to culpable discontinuity.

If we are to accept Foucault's contention that this represents a reduction of all historical agency to the *individual*, we must also add that this does not mean that continuous historiography has *no* positive notion of society. For here the organic steps in to provide a vision of the social that is none other than the sum of human activities springing from, and pursued in harmony with, nature. The great advantage of this idea of the social is that it allows one to declare certain institutions natural, leaving others, at least implicitly, abnormal, aberrant. Great scope is thus afforded to populist renderings of thoroughly conservative ideas. Arthur Bryant, the very epitome of the jingoistic apologist of empire, is much given to finding Britain's greatness in the fields from which its people spring. For here was

a culture that was not founded on Courts and cities but on the green fields and the growing earth. Like a tree it spread upwards. Walking among the water meadows at Bemerton one could see its roots [...].<sup>28</sup>

This is not to say that this great imperial nation did not have institutions, but that these were the repositories for a natural wholesome order.

Like bees the country English gathered honey from the flowers of their own history. The combs in which they stored it were the manifold institutions in which they expressed their social life.

(Bryant, p.53)

Bryant's closest approach to liberalism consists precisely in this effort to dissolve social forces into the good earth, beyond the reach of political science. Power will not, then, seem an imposition so much as a natural effluent. We have already seen the landscape playing the role of author of fictional works. This is underwritten by its supreme role within organic thought, that of preferred author of history. While it is allowed to maintain this role, all will go well.

For though London was the greatest city in the world its people still had their roots in the country or were separated only by a generation or two from country ways.

(Bryant, p.26)

Nevertheless, this was not to last.

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<sup>28</sup> Arthur Bryant, *English Saga; 1840-1940* (London: Fontana, 1953), p.53.



Divorced from the traditional forms of rustic social life of which by long practice they had become past masters, and cut off as it were by the pavements from their own instinctive roots, the English "progressives" fell an easy prey to theory.

(Bryant, p.108)

That is to say another, less wholesome, form of human consciousness intervened; one that, having lost the common sense that comes with the soil, plucks the apple of "theory". It is here that organicism posits its one great rupture that swallows all other ruptures – the divorce from the land. Being a geographical as much as a temporal dislocation, however, it is by no means decisive. Furthermore, since the consciousness engendered by the land is thought of as essential, not at all impersonally determined, it must subsist in some form in the minds of men. There remains, however compromised, a national character, the personification of the land, needing only a modicum of contact with the good earth to be revived.

Local history also is in search of this immemorial consciousness. Being expressly liberal, however, it tends to employ the rhetoric of amelioration. Thus change must go "with the grain of the national character", so that we must study the revolutions and ruptures of previous epochs so as to discover "the most persistently recurrent emotions, impulses, and reactions" to problems which will then appear "a little differently dressed perhaps, but in essence identical".<sup>29</sup> Future

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<sup>29</sup> H.C. Dent, *Change in English Education: A Historical Survey* (London: University of London Press, 1952), p.14.

history must, apparently, be planned to coincide with the demands of this massive personality. Local history thus counts on harnessing

an *innate* respect for truths and systems, habits or buildings which have moulded civilizations or have stood the test of time.

(*Teaching History*, p.5; emphasis mine)

This we will do best by directing the attention of each individual child to

where the pattern of streets and their names reveal the mediaeval town; where there is an old church with a knightly effigy, wool merchant's brass, or line of "weepers"; where you can find your names and your forefathers' occupations on the tombstones in the village churchyard [...].

(*Teaching History*, p.23)

For the landscape thus adumbrated is the very image of all that is continuous and proven in society. Contemplating it will allow children "to be at home in their material background, to share more fully also in the mental and spiritual background of their country" (*Teaching History*, p.21). How curious that children should have to be told to make themselves at home when they are *already there*. We are who we are, already, but our memory needs, occasionally, to be refreshed. Here we come to the major contradiction in this line of thought. For if local history is needed to give children roots in their own "civilization", which they strictly speaking ought to have already, this is precisely because present "society" is insufficient to the task.

To "belong" in this way matters the more to children to-day when the instability of society threatens many of the traditional ways of initiation into the adult world.

(*Teaching History*, p.21)

The good, natural core of "civilization" or "tradition", we are left to assume, can in no way have been involved in producing the "instability of society" which must, mysteriously, come from somewhere else. This is a thoroughly paranoiac notion, positing good and bad twinned histories, between which one can apparently choose. Visibly distressed, as I have shown in an earlier section of this chapter, by the fact that not every child lives in a village, this historiography can only cry to the child; that's not real history, look further beneath the surface.

Standing on the steps of a school dining-room in an urban district, it is possible at dawn or dusk by moonlight to see outlined under the allotments the shape of a Roman amphitheatre.

(*Teaching History*, p.54)

If, as we are constantly being told, "the matter must be selected with a view to showing the continuity of history by relating it to the present" (Strong, p.32), it is perhaps not impertinent to inquire what continuity could possibly be traced between a Roman amphitheatre and allotments, particularly when the latter is garnished with a school dining hall. This, however, is not exactly the point that *Teaching History* wishes to make. Rather it is concerned to show the child that, whatever its actual surroundings, which in this case are implicitly considered to be somewhat lacking, it nevertheless has its own little share of history. The very kindly, consolatory lameness of the gesture implies a lack; the poor child does not live in the most propitious of areas, but we'll do our best to make

it feel comfortable there. The centring of the rural landscape, that which is most rich in history, thus marks out for the child its distance from the hub of things, but kindly adds that it oughtn't to worry about it. There is another society to which it *virtually* belongs; beneath the paving stones, the homestead. The child is simultaneously given the means to plot its place in, and to imagine its way out of, the society in which it finds itself; it will surely appreciate the concession. I would thus suggest that, however well-meaning, sincere and liberal the intentions of the proponents of this system of thought in pedagogy, what one thus gives the child is anything but the means to understand its environment. Rather, one offers it the opportunity – indeed the obligation – to mystify it. This indeed is the criticism made by Harold Entwistle who believes that

there is a danger that the pursuit of life relevance and interest through the neighbourhood type of environmental study aiming at social adjustment, will become an educational device not essentially different in its social implications from the nineteenth-century conception of popular education as something designed to confirm the learner in his divinely ordered, but modest, station in life.

(Entwistle, p.130)

To this I would add that there is a danger that this sort of method tends to confirm the child in his station, modest or otherwise. That is to say, the *same* method, democratically deployed, will produce *differential* results depending on the subject's starting point.

In this matter, however, the historian's efforts have been thoroughly eclipsed, in twentieth century Britain, by those of *literary studies*. Quasi-apolitical and beyond the clammy grip of science, the Arnoldian, Leavisite version of literature is the guardian of "culture", the

originary and eternal humanity that is under threat.<sup>30</sup> I have already shown Leavis demanding a field of literary study that will counter the fragmentation of modern life. It is one that can be found throughout what Basil Willey once called the 'Q' tradition, after Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. In 1946, we must consider

the position of culture amidst the spiritual anarchy so much more sinister than that which disturbed Arnold in 1867.<sup>31</sup>

Such consideration leads to a study that will stabilise, organicise our civilization.

A man cannot be steeped in literature, cannot have formed some standards of criticism, without having used all the faculties of the soul – intelligence and memory to learn, sympathetic imagination to interpret the thought and utterance of men in differing ages and situations, and wisdom to discern the enduring human needs and imperatives beneath the changing surfaces. It is just this unspecialized wisdom that the world cries out for now, and it is just this that the study of literature can best hope to foster.

(Willey, p.21)

Of course this is itself a personal pursuit. The qualities involved are private ones – "intelligence", "sympathetic imagination" – and can be nurtured to produce an "unspecialized wisdom", a general, autonomous culture. As these qualities themselves are essences that lie "beneath the

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<sup>30</sup> Readers of Chris Baldick's *The Social Mission of English Criticism: 1848-1932* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983) will find much that is familiar here.

<sup>31</sup> Basil Willey, *The 'Q' Tradition: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946), p.16.

changing surfaces", *mutatis mutandis*, and thus in no way historically contingent; they can stand outside the scope of historical determination and yet still determine history.

One of the virtues gained from such a study will be something nebulously designated as "style", which "like religion, and moral virtues, is *caught rather than taught*" (Willey, p.32; emphasis mine). The result is both traditional and original,

for originality means, not having no roots, but *having one's own roots*, and the richer the soil they draw nourishment from the better. Wise traditionalists, like Sir J. Reynolds, or Matthew Arnold, or 'Q', or Mr Eliot, have never asked us to copy the great models, but to be aware of them, to be ever conscious of the *past in the present*, and of the *present in relation to the past*.

(Willey, p.34; all emphases mine)

Though this is a patch of rhetoric well trodden by recent critique, it is worth going over it again, if only to point out the broad consonance of its terms – caught not taught, roots, past in the present – with the paedocentric tradition I am considering. The two rhetorics are not, in their material, institutional appearance, consubstantial, but they certainly do not exclude each other. Both respond to a supposed crisis of values by bathing the subject in the very stuff of culture and heritage, hoping thereby to stimulate a spontaneously self-reproducing continuity, composed of individuals who have found their place in the whole.

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The power of this notion of literary studies as a stabilising response to a supposed crisis of tradition has of course waned in recent years. In kiddie-lit however, it is in the ascendent. The avowedly Leavisite Fred Inglis, by explicitly assuming this discourse, highlights the extent to which it is *implicit* in the field.

Faced with the savage ruptures of the century, some recent children's novelists have tried to design an image of historical continuity which keeps faith with the best and strongest elements of this thick residue [...].

(Inglis, p.217)

These fictions thus suggest

another, no less decently liberal and educational way of making world-pictures of history in a world which the old syllabus no longer explains.

(Inglis, p.226)

Desperate times call for desperate measures, which turn out as usual to consist of the study of literature. Let me reiterate; this is possible because fiction may place individuals person to person in an intensely imagined relation that transcends dull analysis, conveniently allowing one to swear off the existing academic apparatus – "the old syllabus". The "world pictures" in question are thus composed of, and by, individuals. So, for Inglis, Gillian Avery's *The Warden's Niece* escapes being "a pale ontological project" because

the characters are too varied for a reader ever to lose sight of the livingness and contingent quality of full-blooded historical enquiry.

(Inglis, p.225)

The character is important to Inglis because it is the correlate of the person who will read the book. This is surely what he means when he writes of his own *The Promise of Happiness*, "the argument of this book pretends a broad likeness between novels and people" (Inglis, p.30). This identificatory schema is important because it allows him to posit literature as the creator of good subjects, and thus of good future history. For "the stories we tell them are intended to make life in the future" (Inglis, p.32). Thus Inglis finds in the work of Garner and Mayne and those like them a bastion of support for the liberal, Arnoldian, Leavisite cultural mission.

The prose of these writers, stilted on ancient place-names and archaic stones, has to do to keep alive the rhythms of old litanies and incantations.

(Inglis, p.240)

So Inglis heaves the sigh of stoic determination that he has learnt from his masters. In so doing, however, he allows himself the melancholy delight of resuscitating *another* set of "old litanies and incantations"; the very critical discourse in which he is engaged. The archaeological tale eagerly obliges such rhetoric. So neatly does it orchestrate its main points in a *realistic setting* – the *individual* who finds in the *ancient landscape* an object that puts him in touch with the *past* – that one may, merely by reprising the storyline recommend, without even having to think about it, the *narrative*. One need not even be as aware as Inglis of its specific cultural alignment or sources. Indeed, criticism tends to slip easily into paraphrase and tautology, the correlates of a belief in the



indivisible reality expressed through the text. Thus we may be told that William Mayne

has brought the past into the present [...] through the age-old mystery of the hills, an organic mystery that works through the imagination of the children [...].

(Moss, 'The Fantastic Living Force of Landscape', p.29)

The invocation of an "organic mystery", that which the fiction claims for itself, marks the point beyond which the critic can, or will, not go. Further explication is apparently futile because, as we are told in an untroubled, matter of fact way, Mayne *has* brought the past into the present. This nonchalant tone is often heard. The child hero of Lucy M. Boston's *The Children of Green Knowe* "encounters objects and, by sensing them and playing with them, imaginatively perceives the life in them" (Chambers, 'The Reader in the Book', p.111). This is undoubtedly true; it is there for all to see in this text and many others like it. By the same token, what function does such comment perform? The narrative passes through criticism's digestive system in its integral form, nothing added and nothing taken away. It is endlessly repeated in critical writing, yet remains untouched by *criticism*. Literal belief in intuitive contact with the past is one possible, even effortless, extension of this.

This power of imaginative insight into the hearts and minds of ancient peoples adds depth to Miss Sutcliffe's books and lifts them above the rut of competent historical stories.

(Colwell, 'Rosemary Sutcliffe', p.125)

This unequivocal belief, however, is not entirely necessary to the functioning of the narrative. Its main distinguishing feature is its indivisibility. Thus, for instance, Penelope Lively

is not trying to convey to children an appreciation of their own past and throwing in a story to make the message more palatable. The stories are seamless garments.  
(Thwaite, 'Penelope Lively', p.601)

Their may be a pattern to such a story, "but there is nothing forced about the pattern; it seems entirely natural" (Thwaite, 'Penelope Lively', p.601). Or, as another critic would have it, "a feeling of belonging to a certain landscape becomes a vital part of the plot structure" (Horowitz, 'Dimensions in Time', p.142). There seems indeed to be a broad tacit consensus that the archaeological narrative is an *item* that cannot be picked apart. History entails the landscape, entails the individual, entails continuity, and so on. I repeat, all the critics can do is endlessly repeat the ensemble in paraphrase. Nevertheless, for all that, they seem to find it endlessly new, remarkable, surprising even. An author – Rosemary Sutcliff – discussing her own work is astonished to find herself reaching what are nevertheless the usual conclusions, apparently led thither by some irresistible force that she herself cannot fully explain.

I seem to have written the word "people" a great many times; and this I think must be because I feel so strongly that history is People – and people not so very unlike ourselves.

(Sutcliff, 'History is People', p.308)

I hope that, at the risk of becoming as repetitive as my subject, I have by now made it clear that such tentativeness (like that of Alison

Lurie with which I started this chapter) is utterly without justification. If there remains any doubt in the reader's mind, let it be noted that the above is hotly followed by the statutory "under the changing surface" (Sutcliff, p.308), culminating in a synopsis faithful to a host of texts of the last thirty years.

It is possible, sometimes, through a letter or a line of ancient poetry or some small object held in the hand, to catch glimpses of people separated from us by two hundred or two thousand years, so like ourselves that for the moment it is almost frightening because for that moment it makes nonsense of time.

(Sutcliff, p.308)

Rather, it occurs to one, what this makes a nonsense of is *history*. Yet, there is one important and powerful continuity that may be noted here; that which exists between critical and fictive discourse, which are locked in an embrace so close as to make them almost indistinguishable. Of course, what does distinguish the fictive version is that here, these ideas are seen to be the musings of a child, discovering them for the first time.

*Perhaps* in fact there were some things that time couldn't absolutely deal with. Very forceful people, like Samuel Stokes. Or very distinctive places, like his enormous garden or whatever it liked to call itself. *Perhaps* such presences had the power to keep on bobbing up for ever, in one way or another, rather like odd moments in one's own head [...].

(Lively, *Stokes*, p.101; emphases mine)

It matters little that Lively has written similar words a hundred times; for each child through whom they are ventriloquized, it is eternally

the first time. The presence of the child reader and his perfect freedom to discover for himself serve thus to validate the discourse, to rubber-stamp it for further critical consumption. Turned in on itself, judged by its own criteria, the narrative then spontaneously simulates truth. This may, nevertheless, produce bizarre effects.

The relentlessness, the irresistible inevitability of events is, thus, a determinist view of human behaviour, and one that Garner shares with Thucydides, not over a 2000-year gap but *now*. As Tom says in *Red Shift*, "I see everything at once."  
(McVitty, 'Alan Garner', p.377)

The critic here is not merely noting the presence of a continuity within the fiction, but re-enacting it in the form of recognition; for if Garner is Thucydides' contemporary, then any subsequent reader endowed with a suitable sensibility may be the contemporary of both, and so on in a *mise en abyme* of recognitions. By reading a text concerned with continuity, then, one may partake of that continuity. Similarly, the reader of E. Nesbit's *Story of the Amulet*, transported into Nesbit's time would, in spite of contingent differences, find an element of continuity in its child counterparts.

The children, in spite of their odd clothes, would be very much like himself. He still enjoys the books E. Nesbit wrote for and about such children. Her books are modern – or rather, timeless – because the children in them ring true to childhood in any time.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Anthea Bell, *E. Nesbit* (London: Bodley Head, 1960), p.14.

The critic reprises the time-slip narrative to bring the child reader into an embrace with his sempiternal peer group. Kiddie-lit, it would seem, not only recommends continuity; by its very nature, it effects it.

The dead do come back again in the lives they have touched, in the gardens they have made and in their children's children; the years are rolled away in stories and poems, and in the Edens we remember.

(Landsberg, p.180)

This, Landsberg suggests, is a quality of all good children's literature, and not just archaeological tales. It is presumably also the force that allows adults to access their own childhoods, their own pasts. The archaeological story is thus arguably the supreme expression of a tendency towards retrospection that permeates the whole field.

I have already noted an apparent repetitiveness in my own analysis. Nominally different sections of my argument have tended to produce remarkably similar utterances by way of evidence. This has been necessary not merely to demonstrate, by sheer weight of numbers, the ubiquity of this sort of thinking in certain domains, nor even the interdependence of its various constituent elements, though these are certainly important points to note. Rather what I am especially interested to suggest is the way in which a flatness of terrain, a stasis of thought is made to appear three-dimensional and mobile in the constant to-and-fro between fiction and criticism, the quasi-independent "discovery" of the same truths by biologically separate individuals doing ostensibly different jobs. For in the same moment that it mystifies its relations with more contingent, interested discourses – pedagogy, the literary mission, *previous* continuous historiography – and thus forgets its own cultural

genesis, the field of kiddie-lit posits a loose network of disinterested parties who, by virtue firstly of their individuality, and secondly of their separate functions in the field – author, critic – assure the uniqueness of each enunciation, and the free play of recognitions. For what is recognition but the discovery of the same thing *somewhere else*? Strolling around this small, but expanding, slice of the cultural turf, one is constantly astonished to encounter walking analogies for one's own self.

Against the snugness of this spontaneous community, the interlopers, the didacts, those who have allowed themselves to be parted from the good soil by the pavement, the pocket watch and the motor-car, do not stand a chance. Thus if, as Elaine Moss claims in 1976, political debate over the role of such things as race and gender in kiddie-lit has reached the stage where common ground is possible, this has not required the kiddie-lit institution to budge its somnolent bulk one inch. For ideas are

less spiked, on the assault side, with intractable terminology. We are now past that stage. Plain words can be used.<sup>33</sup>

Plain words, it should be remembered, are those that kiddie-lit wants to hear. Thus it is the mythical simple discourse that envelops the whole kiddie-lit institution that has won the day, defusing a threat from without. Furthermore, it is even more clear than usual that the "plain" is in direct opposition to conscious ideology, indeed to any external influence that might assail the truth. Happily, the institution is proof

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<sup>33</sup> Elaine Moss, *Children's Books of the Year 1975* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976), p.9.

against these, thanks to its organic ability to absorb, assimilate and recuperate.

The maturity of any literature is to be measured, surely, by the ability it has to absorb new trends in thinking without losing its old hard-won standards.

(Moss, *Children's Books of the Year 1975*, p.10)

As is usual in these cases, rupture is imagined as a threat from beyond or outside, to which the time-honoured principles owe nothing. If only we all fell happily into line with the natural reasonableness that suffuses the organic consciousness, we could all agree thus, just like the warring Romans and Celts in Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Eagle of the Ninth* who

are finally welded into an inseparable unity by one force of nature – the country itself.

(Horovitz, 'Dimensions in Time', p.142)

## Afterword



Whither could one turn but to nature? Where else could one hope to find a neutral ground into which time and precise, contingent cultural differences might be neatly dissolved? Ironically, it is precisely at those points in the text where the collocation of eternity and the green field is evoked that the element of didactic, of preaching, is closest to the surface.

He thought about nothingness, or at least a field and grass and air, and this nothingness being filled by a house and people where no house had been, indeed, lots of houses and people [...] and how curious this was and whether the nothingness, or at least the field and the grass and what not, went on being there in a funny way.

(*Lively, Stokes, p.18*)

Nevertheless, it is the taking of this position, and its enunciation through the mouth of the child that allows one to appear to disagree with a museum exhibition that suggests that "everything ought to stand still for ever" (*Stokes, p.48*), while nevertheless maintaining that

if people had just sat tight and let things take their course, let the place have its say, as it were, then everything might have been all right.

(*Lively, Stokes, p.42*)

A version of continuity – time standing still – whose conservatism is alarmingly apparent is pointedly rejected in favour of a softer organic version. Here, it is merely a matter of allowing the innocent, timeless land to speak for itself – than which nothing could be more liberal. Effectively, this whole thesis has been about this sort of recourse to the imaginary domain of the organic, and the putative liberalisation of what might otherwise appear to be rather oppressive ideas thus effected.

Occasional instances of atavism serve as uncomfortable reminders of an undesirable line of political continuity. Thus Peter Ackroyd, who along with Lively has written adult novels that resemble archaeological kiddie-lit, admits that though gay, he could never be an activist.

It's partly to do with the books I write, in which things repeat themselves. There's hardly any point in being politically active if you think that history is circular. The only way out is to make room for moments of transcendence in which you remove yourself from that circle of time.<sup>1</sup>

By a piquant coincidence, Lively is there on the next page of the same edition of *The Observer*, explaining her role as judge for the Rhône-Poulenc Science Book Prize.

I have a particular passion for palaeontology. I suppose that is the historian in me. It's a fascination with levels of time.<sup>2</sup>

What precisely differentiates Ackroyd's circularity and Lively's co-existing levels? I would suggest that they mark out different *rhetorical* positions, ones that might well entail mutual antipathy on the level of rhetoric and position-taking, yet do not quite disagree on the relation between history and political action. Ackroyd, as is abundantly apparent, opts for quietism: Lively, as I hope is by now clear, believes in leaving action as far as possible to the ministrations of the organic order. Surely this amounts, effectively, on the level of political action, to the same thing. The rhetorical differentiation remains, nevertheless, important,

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Billen, 'Printed Melancholy Unpublished Giggles', *Observer*, 24 May 1992, p.60.

<sup>2</sup> Robin McKie, 'Apes and Fossils in a Wonderful World', *Observer*, 24 May 1992, p.61.

and has real effects in organizing the field of political positions. Who but the occasional Ackroyd of the old right would not, in the present instance, prefer to be seen as liberal, giving and, if not quite permissive, at least on the side of freedom?

I have hoped, in juxtaposing, without necessarily ascribing origins, lines of parentage or sequences of influence, various relatively autonomous discourses – Malthusian philanthropy, paedocentric pedagogy, Leavisite lit-crit, and current criticism of kiddie-lit – to evoke a broad field of operation, inhabited by divergent interests, but which nevertheless implies a single coherent political domain. This domain, furthermore, seems to me to represent the central ground for political debate in the latter half of the twentieth century, providing the fundamental agreements on which distinguishing disagreements are based. Malthusian philanthropy, I would suggest, is indicative of a broad historical shift that has taken us from overtly vertical imagining of power relations to a softer, more horizontal structuring based on the notion of a common core of language that will abolish contradiction and conflict on the level of discourse without need of analysis, or indeed of *politics*.

Kiddie-lit, it seems to me, in its current bid for academic power, plays an important role in this domain in making available to sincere liberals a notion of a classless society – that of children – that is not so obviously bogus as that of John Major. This critical discourse, in so far as it sees itself as instrumental, proposes what is effectively an educational practice, but one that takes the appearance of an engaged *laissez-faire*. Putting its faith in nature's ability to bring out what is natural in the child, and expecting this to bear a strong resemblance to its own bourgeois notions of decency, kiddie-lit effects a programme of social engineering

based on the mechanical principle of *inertia*. The place of education in kiddie-lit is thus the countryside, where the social machine is supposed to run down, leaving that which is purely natural.

It will by now have been noticed that none of this provides any grounds for either recommending or rejecting a given book as suitable reading matter for children; this, I expect, will puzzle, if not affront, many kiddie-lit critics, for whom the erection of an unimpeachable canon is of the first importance. It might, for example, be deduced that I am implying a need for children's books set in the city, but this is not the case. While I would not necessarily object to such a development, it would be quite beside the point of my argument to give any grounds whatsoever for canonising this or that thematics in kiddie-lit. Nor would I wish to ban or restrict access to the texts I have discussed. For in critiquing, however, harshly, these texts, my precise aim has been to demonstrate their complicity with a developing pseudo-academic discourse, whose implications are relatively distant from the matter of child reading. This thesis has thus been more expressly concerned with an adult readership, their stake in certain material already to be found in kiddie-lit, and their elaboration of this material for purposes which, in spite of all protestations to the contrary, are distinctly adult. Here, the importance of being on the side of the child is precisely that this is felt to provide access to nature, by a specious subtraction of the social, and thence to a non-political political discourse. That is to say, one may speak of matters that properly belong to the domain of the political without having to pass through any stage of recognizably political reflection, which indeed one effects to despise as a matter of hopelessly artificial men in suits. Magical thinking is thus conceivably making inroads into academia.

*Fascinating Connections: The Newsletter for Creative and Innovative People* is a leaflet produced by Enterprise in Higher Education at Glasgow University. In amongst eulogies to "Hexagonal Thinking" nestles, in the January 1992 edition, an article 'A Plea for Magic' by Alison Prince, a writer for children.<sup>3</sup> Writing from her "vine-clad" Glasgow house, Prince advocates a state of "multi-reality" into which "we are all born". This we lose, in spite of its universality, for "the adult world, with its skill in handling the business of life, is much more remote than the common ground of mythology". Estranged from our birthright, restricted to a "single level of consciousness", we are "subverted by individual anarchy". This sort of thinking will be familiar from preceding chapters of this thesis. It is thus no surprise to see a kiddie-lit author glad to find another platform from which to recount her favourite story. What is worth noting, however, is where this article appears. We are dealing here with *enterprise* in higher education, one of a number of quango organisations, including staff training groups and so on, which tend to peddle a mixture of the "latest" pedagogical methods, which rarely suggest anything unthought of by Pestalozzi, as part of a central programme of introducing such things as management reform, assessment and calibration of performance. Prince, for one, is apparently unconcerned by this unholy alliance of *business* and what she terms magic.

Of all the political issues that could be attracted into kiddie-lit, one seems to be particularly seductive; namely, feminism. This operates from the base of an analogy between the oppression of woman and the oppression of child which may even be found in the kiddie-lit text itself.

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<sup>3</sup> Alison Prince, 'A Plea for Magic', in *Fascinating Connections: The Newsletter for Creative and Innovative People*, issue 3, January 1992.

It had struck him before as unfair that while it is considered in bad taste and is in some respects illegal to imply that women are inferior, all sorts of rude things can be and indeed are said about children.

(Lively, *Stokes*, p.68)

Critical application of a similar equivalence has already been glimpsed in Julia Briggs's essay 'Women Writers', from which I have already quoted extensively. Another example, however, will serve better to suggest future developments in this area. Lissa Paul's 'Enigma Variations: What Feminist Theory Knows About Children's Literature' is present by Peter Hunt in *Children's Literature* as an exciting new use of theory.

It is a radical and inspired piece which, to borrow Lissa Paul's own words, breathes life 'into what was becoming the moribund discipline of literary criticism'.

(Hunt, *Children's Literature*, p.148)

Consequently, Paul exhibits the usual *Signal* diffidence with regard to academic discourse.

I write fiction masquerading as criticism: a mode of discourse that hides and reveals my personal pleasure in a text inside a raincoat of scholarly language.

(Paul, p.149)

From this dubious position, underpinned by the idea that rational analysis is "male-order language -- not suited to discussions about the *inscapes* of women's stories" (Paul, p.155; emphasis mine), Paul proposes the importation of her notion of feminism into kiddie-lit.

There is good reason for appropriating feminist theory to children's literature. Both women's literature and children's literature are devalued and regarded as marginal or peripheral by the literary and educational communities.

(Paul, p.149)

In the end, however, quite the reverse seems to happen; the magical thinking of kiddie-lit provides pointers for feminism.

Women in literature are disproportionately shown as physically trapped [...]. But the protagonists in children's literature transcend, and, for the most part, win, even when the endings of stories are not conventionally happy.

(Paul, p.150)

In the process, politics has been moved inwards; subversion will occur in the imagination of the reader. Children have an advantage here in that "they are not yet closed in by the rules of adulthood" (Paul, pp.151). So it is that

these child protagonists create options that are simply unthinkable to grown-ups whose conditioned responses have already closed in on them. That is one of the reasons why these stories are of value to us as adults.

(Paul, p.151)

All the usual critical manoeuvres are in play here; the representation of subversion is taken without question as the thing itself, the thoughts of child characters written by an adult are, puzzlingly, described as "unthinkable to grown-ups" and so on. The category "grown-

ups", of course, does not include the kiddie-lit critic, who (according to Eleanor Cameron, here quoted by Paul) must have

the capacity to move freely 'between intuitive thinking and logic' and between adult experience and the freshness of child vision. Cameron says that 'the critic worth reading neither destroys nor chews to shreds; one tries to reveal'.

(Paul, p.156)

For women, like children, are more at home with the intuitive than with beastly, male analysis. We thus see, in Paul's argument

the shift from a print-based, cause-and-effect (essentially male-order) mode of discourse to an audio/visual, storytelling (essentially female) mode of discourse [...].

(Paul, pp.155-6)

The ideal world imagined is thus one

where it is possible for a woman to succeed in a man's world, and where nurturing instincts need not be devalued in relation to science and reason: 'the Scientific Discoverer' doesn't have to suppress the gardener.

(Paul, p.160)

As I have said, Paul's argument tends to recommend supposed child qualities to woman as liberatory strategies. These, then, consist of life-renewal through inward imaging, intuitive thinking, and gardening. The general effect is to recommend to woman the putative inner flexibility of the child, yet the image of woman thus furnished by standard child discourse is a strangely familiar one. What is more, and what is



more damning for Paul's project, it is one that does not strike one as being at all uncongenial to patriarchy. Indeed, if there is something that feminist theory ought to be telling kiddie-lit, it is precisely that this magical gardening notion of liberation has had a long and fruitful history as a means of benevolent, kind oppression. Instead, here the reverse happens, and under the aegis of kiddie-lit studies, the infantilisation of women gains a new ally. It is this that has been my central concern; that the growing establishment of criticism of children's literature, availing itself of a notion of unsocialised action in the political sphere, validated by the child reader, is in the process of producing own-brand, recuperated versions of existing academic discourse that provide a sheen of daring and theoretical credibility to political positions that might otherwise have been thought superannuated and obsolescent. The place of children's literature in the education of children remains a worthwhile area of research, but its place in the education of adults seems to me to be of an immediate and pressing importance.

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